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PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro

PREVIEWED

PARIAH [PS2/XB/PC]

MECHASSAULT 2 [XB]

WANDA TO KYOZOU [PS2]

EVERQUEST II [PC]

THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY [PS2]

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2: WARRIOR WITHIN [PS2/XB/GC/PC]

180 PAGES OF LINKING GREAT GAMES

REVIEWED

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA The Minish Cap

PREVIEWED

JADE EMPIRE

Bioware reveals its Shanghai surprise


eMag

The games industry has shifted up a gear ready to take advantage of the pre-Christmas boom. Sales are up, likewise profits, as all the major players release their key titles in the expectation that we'll spend our money on one of the most varied and competitive line-ups this generation of hardware has experienced.

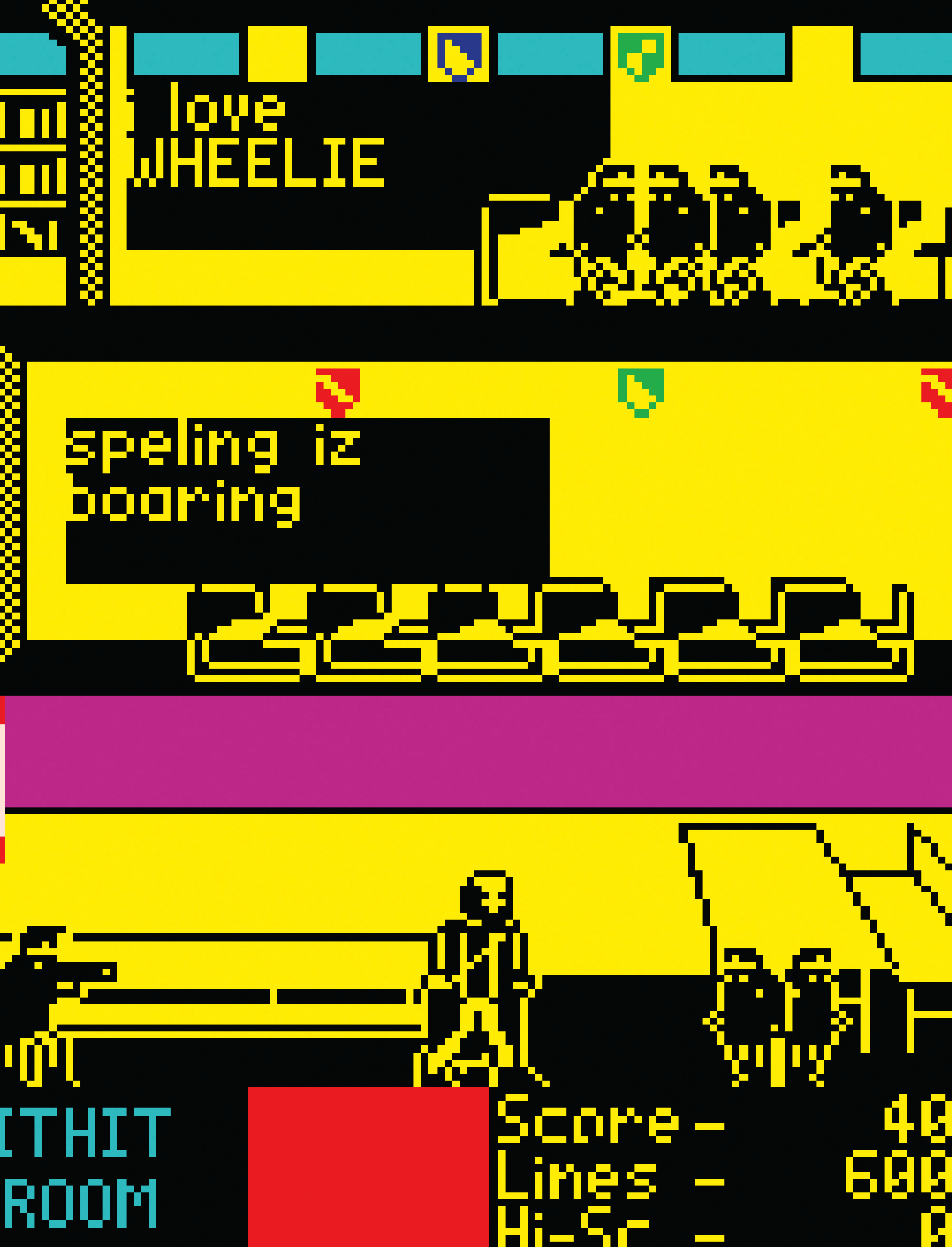
Such is the pressure on publishers and developers at this time of year that we find ourselves in the unusual position of being denied the opportunity to review a raft of key titles, presumably to prevent us from writing anything other than glowing reviews (a job that we happily leave to other magazines).

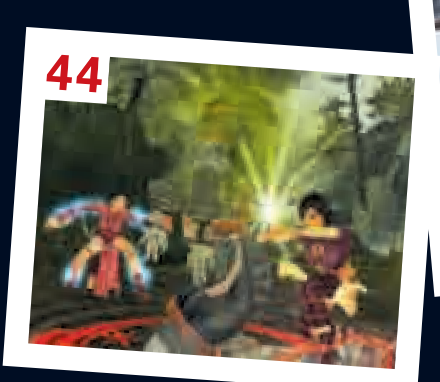
Oddly enough, this kid-glove approach to the whims of developers often seems at odds with the software in question, and while there's little doubt that shrouding certain titles in secrecy – in spite of their apparent quality – can create the kind of hype that will ensure success, it can also create a vacuum that leads to leaked code and mistrust of the smattering of exclusive reviews that do actually make it to the shelves on time. Neither is particularly satisfactory for magazines or developers and we can only hope that that this over-protectiveness of key titles is short-lived.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor




gamesTM 25
roolz
500 lines
ERIC
skool daze
MR WI
MAP


I love WHEELIE
speling iz booring
ITHIT
ROOM
Score -
Lines -
Hi-Sc -







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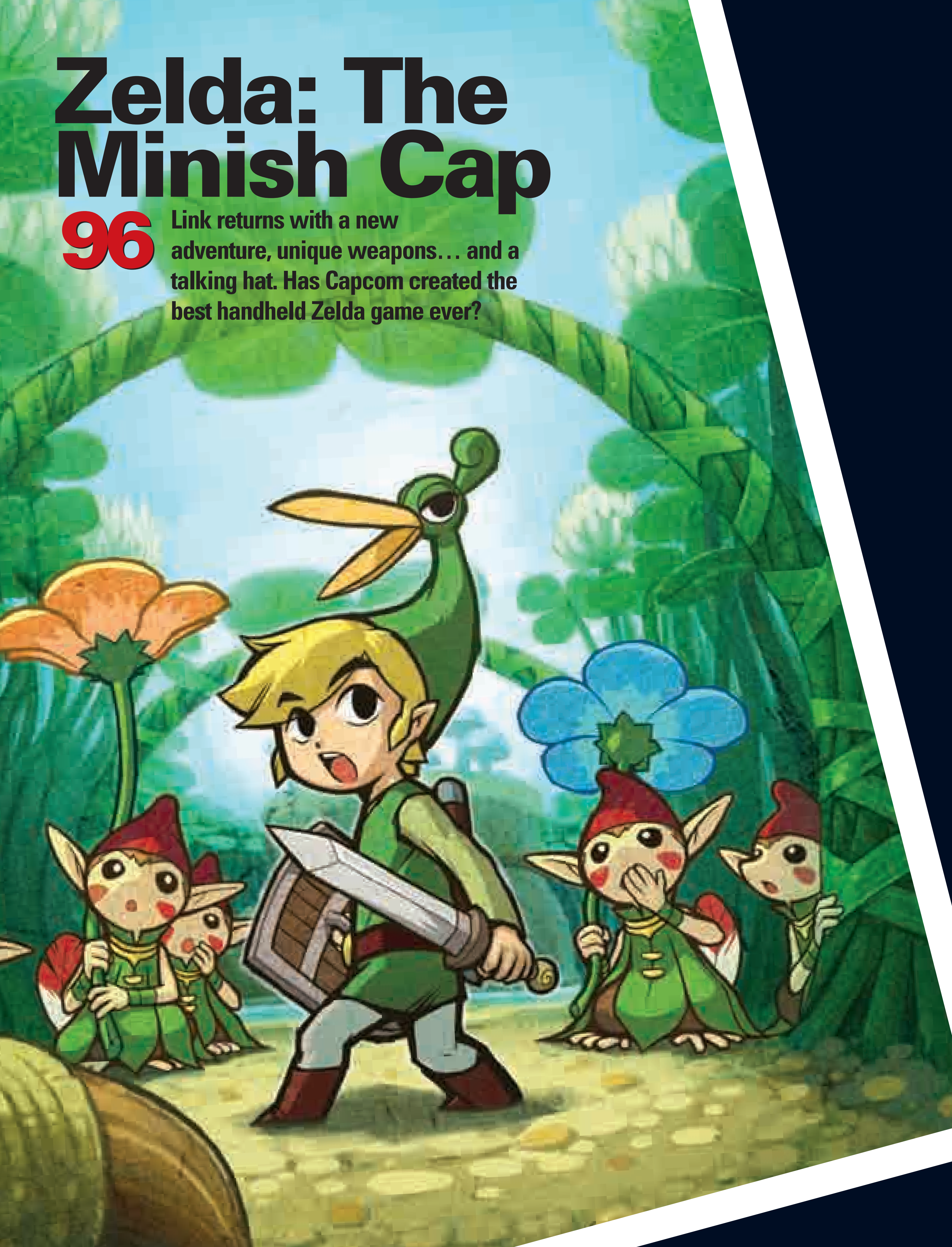
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Zelda: The Minish Cap

96 Link returns with a new adventure, unique weapons… and a talking hat. Has Capcom created the best handheld Zelda game ever?

NEWS



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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

DOUBLE IMPACT

NINTENDO DS AND LAUNCH GAMES FINALLY TESTED

Reggie Fils-Aime's threats of ass-kicking may hang in the air, but at Nintendo's Gamers Summit in Seattle developers were happy to speak to Nintendo's VP of sales and marketing. Seventeen DS games were available to try, most of them using the new DS abilities (such as touch-screen control). The biggest titles on show were *Super Mario 64 DS* and *Metroid Prime: Hunters*, not only because of brand recognition but because people could see what the DS would do to a well-known game. Both games provoked mixed reactions thanks to the new control set-ups yet most people could see the potential that the DS unlocks.

Richard Vorodi, designer of *Metroid Prime: Hunters*, thinks the DS will break down barriers to gaming. "The interesting thing about the touch panel is it calls out to basic human nature where if you want to do something you touch it or you poke at it. You just touch the screen, you see what you like and push it."

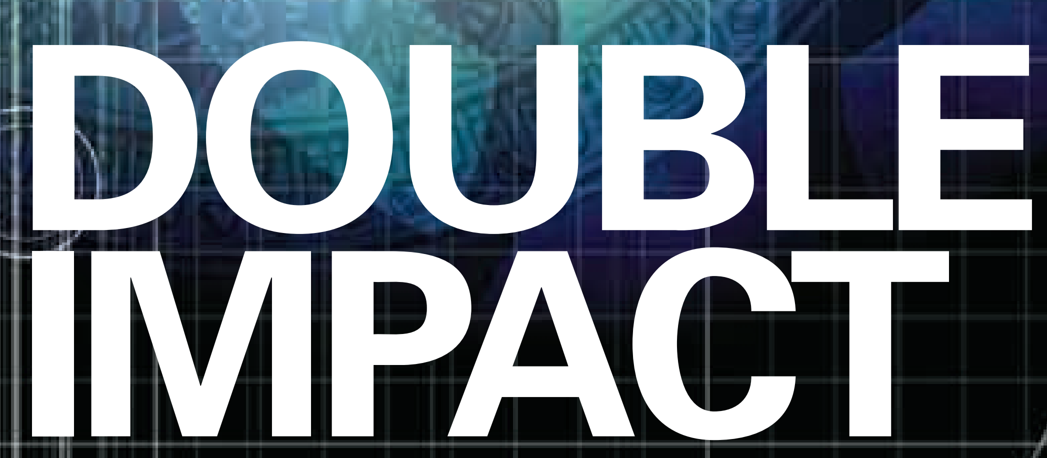
The Wi-Fi multiplayer capabilities also found fans with titles such as THQ's *Ping Pals*, a text message/game hybrid. Karphik Bala, CEO of Vicarious Visions, thinks Wi-Fi will prove the big draw for the DS. "The primordial human nature of games is all about social interaction," he explains. "Gaming has gone more mainstream because you can share it with more people, and now that you have portable devices with the ability to share and have new experiences with other people, it's going to have much more rapid growth."

There are worries that the DS's new features mean developers will use them for the sake of it, so is there a danger that studios will fall into the mini-game mentality? Cohen says no, Bala says yes, Vorodi says "It's up to developers".

There was also speculation about the DS's future, with Fils-Aime dropping hints about its connectivity with Nintendo's next console. Phil Cohen, assistant producer at Namco's new handheld department, has a few ideas about what this could mean. "I think a big hurdle that's going to happen for the DS around this point next year is probably going to be online, but I'm speculating," he said. "I know there's a lot of drive to get it online."

But that's a future concern. Right now, there are enough games and features for the DS to enjoy a successful launch on 21 November.

> **"THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT THE TOUCH PANEL IS IT** CALLS OUT TO BASIC HUMAN NATURE WHERE IF YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING **YOU TOUCH IT OR YOU POKE AT IT**. YOU JUST TOUCH THE SCREEN AND YOU **SEE WHAT YOU LIKE** AND PUSH IT"
> RICHARD VORODI



POSSIBILITIES…

THE DS HAS CAUSED A STIR BUT WHAT DO THE MAIN PLAYERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT?

THE SALES PITCH

Nintendo's vice president of sales and marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime, is keen to evangelise about the DS. "Nintendo DS is critically important for us on a number of parts… it really backs up the message of an aggressive new Nintendo," he says. "The Nintendo DS is significant to the industry. From our perspective it points the way forward; it's the road map to the future. Well, the fact is, any consumer research [shows] consumers are already saying, from a graphics standpoint, things can't get much better… In fact, from our perspective, from what we know and what gamers are telling us, functionality is what points the way forward. In their experience, a better connection between the gamer and the gaming experience is where we need to go, and the Nintendo DS works on that experience."

THE PRODUCER

With the recent flurry of activity in the handheld sector, Namco has created a Handheld Department dedicated to games for the mini-systems. Phil Cohen, assistant producer at this new department, sees the DS as a sure-fire hit. "One [bonus] is the price. It's coming out at $149, automatically it's ready for the mass market. The other one is that Nintendo has an incredible track record with its handhelds so it already has pretty good backing. From a publisher's standpoint, the development costs are also much lower than the PSP, at least at this point in time. And also the cost of goods is lower than the GBA so even though we're selling them at the same price, the publishers make a little bit more profit off selling DS games. There's a lot of incentive to put things on DS. Also, because of the new way to interact with it, using the microphone and touch-screen, we just feel it opens up so much room for creativity that there's going to be really unique games on here that help drive sales."

THE VERDICT

The DS represents the biggest leap handheld gaming has seen since the Game Boy arrived. The touch screen allows developers to break the mould, as titles like *Ridge Racer DS* and *Metroid Prime: Hunters* both sport control set-ups impossible on any other system. Developers are genuinely excited about the possibilities that lie ahead and everyone we spoke to was brimming with ideas for the DS. Studios are keen to embrace the creativity the DS offers but our major concern is that it's a question of when, rather than if, the conveyor-belt mentality towards DS games will begin, as developers look to offer little more than token touch-screen mini-games. Nevertheless, Nintendo has enough momentum to hit the ground running. We'll have to wait and see if it can match Sony stride for stride after that.

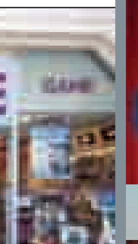
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



CASH BACK

Game has decided to give its reward scheme an overhaul and we'll soon be seeing the last of its vouchers dropping through our letterboxes. The new scheme – which has already proved successful in France and Sweden – will see customers receiving points for purchases as before, but now 100 points will instantly be redeemable in-store as £2.50 cash. This new way to reward customers will be named Instant Savings, and the scheme's launch will include a new design for the card and will be supported by a marketing campaign.

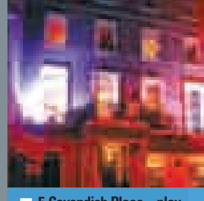




BLOODY STUDENTS

As if there aren't enough diversions to distract students from their studies, Midway will be providing yet another as part of a *Mortal Kombat: Deception* promotion. The softco plans to find the UK's best *Deception* player by setting up tournaments in student unions across the country. The heats will take place this autumn, with the final being held before the end of the year. A trip to Asia is up for grabs, so start practising those combos (when you've finished your essay).



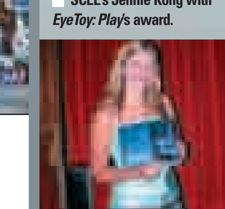


5 Cavendish Place – playground of the rich and famous.

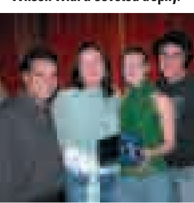


'The throng', with some wag cussing us up big time.

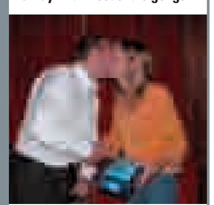
SCEE's Jennie Kong with *EyeToy: Play*'s award.



Nintendo's Claire Stocks-Wilson with a coveted trophy.



The Ubisoft team walked away with most of the gongs.



Indie magazine editor Alison Wood got a bonus prize.

DRUM ROLL, PLEASE...

WE DISH OUT THE PRIZES AT THIS YEAR'S GAMES™ AWARDS



Celebrations and congratulations were the order of the day at the second annual games™ awards this September, where the industry's great and good gathered to see who would be picking up this year's accolades.

It's not often that we don our glad rags – but when we do, it's done with style. Suited and booted, we abandoned the golden beaches of Bournemouth and headed for bustling London, where we were met by a selection of industry figures for an evening of shameless drinking, impressive dancing and excessive merriment.

Sponsored by O2, the event took place at 5 Cavendish Square, where 15 awards were up for grabs. Nine of the categories had been voted for by our panel of industry judges; the remaining six – Game Of The Year, PC Game Of The Year, PlayStation2 Game Of The Year, Xbox Game Of The Year, GameCube Game Of The Year and GBA Game Of The Year – were decided by **games™** readers.

A quick scan down the full list of winners on the right will show that it was a very good night for Ubisoft, who walked away with six awards including Game Of The Year for the incredible *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, Best Online Multiplayer for *Rainbow Six 3* and Best Publisher.

"The **games™** awards night was certainly one to remember for Ubisoft," said Lidia Stojanovic, head of communications for Ubisoft UK. "Huge thanks to all the readers who voted in our favour. There is no greater recognition for us than that which comes from the people who are playing our games. Our six awards now have pride of place in the office and we're busy working on a whole host of new games that we hope will be next year's award winners."

After storming the awards last year, Nintendo received just the one trophy this time for *Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising* on the GBA, while Intelligent Systems, the team responsible for the *Advance Wars* series, took home the award for Best Developer.

One award that certainly didn't surprise was the readers' choice of *EyeToy: Play* as



"THE GAMES™ AWARDS NIGHT WAS CERTAINLY ONE TO REMEMBER FOR UBISOFT"
LIDIA STOJANOVIC, UBISOFT

"**OUR SIX AWARDS** NOW HAVE PRIDE OF PLACE IN THE OFFICE AND WE'RE BUSY WORKING ON A **WHOLE HOST OF NEW GAMES** THAT WE HOPE WILL BE **NEXT YEAR'S AWARD WINNERS**"
LIDIA STOJANOVIC, UBISOFT

PlayStation2 Game Of The Year. Despite being up against stiff competition from *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* and *Final Fantasy X-2*, the popularity of Sony's peripheral was never really in doubt and, with nothing else quite like it on the market, a public vote was bound to declare it the winner.

It wasn't all about taking home trophies, though. Even those that missed out on an award this time around joined in the celebrations and partied hard. "The night was a victory for **games™**," commented Leo Tan of Barrington Harvey PR. "And my thanks for hosting the event in central London, even though it did mean we missed the chance to visit the seaside. A great turn-out backed up by the greatest racing game of all time winning the GameCube Game Of The Year award – a very enjoyable evening. Roll on next year."

THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL

With so many quality titles out this year it was a tough job to decide which was best. Here's the full rundown of the winners…

GAME OF THE YEAR
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time (Ubisoft)

PC GAME OF THE YEAR
Far Cry (Ubisoft)

PLAYSTATION2 GAME OF THE YEAR
EyeToy: Play (SCEE)

XBOX GAME OF THE YEAR
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic (LucasArts)

GAMECUBE GAME OF THE YEAR
F-Zero GX (Sega)

GBA GAME OF THE YEAR
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising (Nintendo)

BEST MOBILE PHONE GAME
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater (Activision/Gameloft)

BEST USE OF A LICENCE
TRON 2.0 (Ubisoft)

BEST COMEBACK
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time (Ubisoft)

BEST OFFLINE MULTIPLAYER
Pro Evolution Soccer 3 (Konami)

BEST ONLINE MULTIPLAYER
Rainbow Six 3 (Ubisoft)

BEST VISUALS
Max Payne [GBA] (Rockstar)

BEST SOUND
Battlefield: Vietnam (EA)

BEST DEVELOPER
Intelligent Systems

BEST PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

GAMES™ SPECIAL AWARD
Microsoft



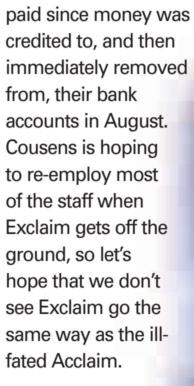
ACCLAIM STORY

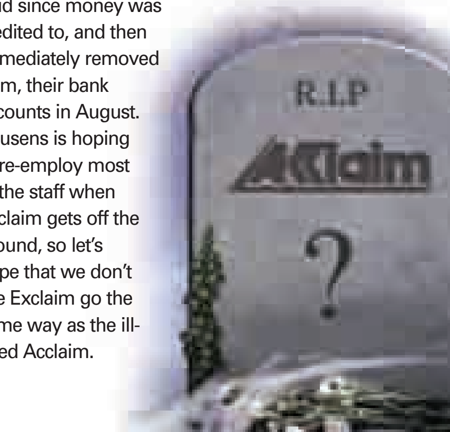
ROD COUSENS JUST WON'T LET IT GO

Spare a thought for the employees at Acclaim. Following the company's bankruptcy, it looked like all was not lost when former CEO Rod Cousens announced that he was hoping to resurrect the firm in a new guise. With funding from American firm Europlay Capital Advisors, Cousens was planning to restart operations at Acclaim's Cheltenham and Manchester offices under the name Exclaim.

However, legal proceedings in the US have temporarily halted the deal designed to save the two studios. The exact cause of the hold-up isn't known, although it's believed to be due to concerns raised by administrators overseeing the liquidation of Acclaim in New York. Sources suggest the courts are reluctant to give the go-ahead to the hand-over, which would see Exclaim acquire several Acclaim IPs such as *Heist* and *Interview With A Made Man*. Another Acclaim title, *Juiced*, is being sold to THQ, this deal having already been approved.

There are around 160 staff at the Manchester and Cheltenham studios, and they haven't been paid since money was credited to, and then immediately removed from, their bank accounts in August. Cousens is hoping to re-employ most of the staff when Exclaim gets off the ground, so let's hope that we don't see Exclaim go the same way as the ill-fated Acclaim.







BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



IT'S ALL GREEK TO US

The European Commission will be taking Greece to court over its blanket ban on gaming devices. Greece passed the law in order to abolish slot machines and other gambling systems, but the wording of the ban means that it includes "electrical, electromechanical and electronic games" – in other words, videogames. According to the Commission, this contravenes the principle of the free movement of goods within the EU. It's hoped that once the matter gets to court it will be resolved quickly, so Greek gamers may be able to enjoy *Halo 2* after all.

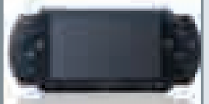




GIZMONDO JOINS SCI

Tiger Telematics has signed a new deal with British publisher SCi which will see 12 of SCi's titles being released on the forthcoming Gizmondo handheld. This arrangement means we'll be seeing games like *Richard Burns Rally* and *Conflict: Vietnam* being brought to the multi-tasking machine. We can only hope that the handheld versions of these titles will be a vast improvement on the console versions or Tiger could be doing itself and its new machine more harm than good.





Why is Sony so secretive about the PSP's capabilities? Something to hide…?



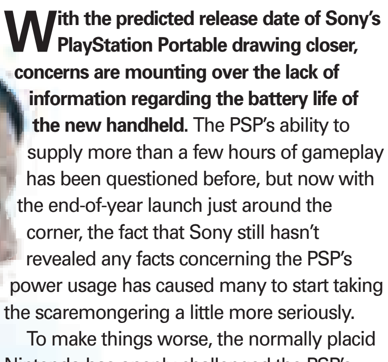


WE HAVE THE POWER?

THE PSP'S BATTERY LIFE IS QUESTIONED YET AGAIN

With the predicted release date of Sony's PlayStation Portable drawing closer, concerns are mounting over the lack of information regarding the battery life of the new handheld. The PSP's ability to supply more than a few hours of gameplay has been questioned before, but now with the end-of-year launch just around the corner, the fact that Sony still hasn't revealed any facts concerning the PSP's power usage has caused many to start taking the scaremongering a little more seriously.

To make things worse, the normally placid Nintendo has openly challenged the PSP's battery life. "Let me tell you something," said Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aime at a DS press event in Seattle. "Those women at the Tokyo Game Show with those portable consoles strapped to them? What you didn't see is that those women were having to go recharge the batteries every two hours. Nowhere will you find any mention of the… machine's power life. And you have to wonder why." This attack was unexpected, as Nintendo's feelings before now have generally been that it doesn't consider the PSP a real competitor.



The word on the street is that is that the PSP can handle up to ten hours of audio playback but only two hours of video playback or gameplay, but in order to combat this Sony will be supplying a "battery emulator" as part of the developer tool set, so developers can ensure that their titles aren't going to drain power too quickly. This will make life more difficult for developers who have previously praised the PSP for being easy to work with.

When asked about Sony's view on the rumours regarding the PSP's battery life, Jennie Kong, Sony's UK PR manager, said, "We do not comment on speculation. We are looking forward to announcing more about PSP for the European market by the end of the year." So it seems that Sony will continue to shrug off internet hearsay and rivals' attacks and hold on to any further information until it thinks the time is right.

CLIMAX BACK ON TRACK WITH LICENSED MMORPG

WARHAMMER AND TONGS

Having apparently lost their only chance of getting to live in their own virtual world, Warhammer fans will be pleased to hear that a massively multiplayer online RPG based on the franchise is back on the cards.

Warhammer Online, which was due to be published by Sega Europe, had been in development at Climax until its cancellation in June this year. Work stopped after Games Workshop – the owner of the licence and the project's financial backer – pulled its funding, citing concerns over the fiscal viability of the venture. However, the game is now back in production and could see the light of day in less than two years.

"Climax Online has continued to finance the development of the project with the full blessing of Games Workshop," said David Nicholson, president of Climax Online. "With such a lot of effort put into the game, we're obviously very pleased to say that development is continuing and we're in discussion with a number of potential partners to deploy *Warhammer Online*."

Despite continuing to offer support, Games Workshop is no longer involved with the title financially. "Games Workshop is and always has been very pleased with the development of the game," Nicholson says. "It's seen the enhancements to the engine we've made since the announcement, and it's very impressed with what we have achieved."



Take your tabletop antics to the web…

games™ THE TOP FIVE

SCARIEST SURVIVAL HORRORS EVER

No.5 ALONE IN THE DARK
The innovator, but not the best

No.4 FORBIDDEN SIREN
Shame about the voice-overs

No.3 PROJECT ZERO
They're coming out the goddamn walls

No.2 SILENT HILL 2
Still king of the hill in our eyes

No.1 RESIDENT EVIL
Capcom's zombie mash reigns supreme

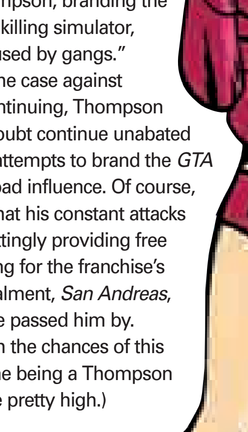
YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

ROCKSTAR TITLE BLAMED FOR INCITING VIOLENCE… AGAIN

Like a hungry dog that just won't let go of a bone, Florida lawyer Jack Thompson has once again accused Rockstar Games of leading children astray.

Following his previous work blaming games like *Grand Theft Auto*, *Doom* and *Manhunt* for the violent behaviour of American teenagers, Thompson has alleged that Rockstar's heralded *GTA* series was used as a 'training tool' for a high-school massacre that was recently averted by Massachusetts police.

According to police reports, 16-year-old Tobin Kerns had planned to carry out an attack at his school in April next year (the fifth anniversary of the Columbine massacre) in an attempt to murder students and teachers alike, before turning on the emergency services responding to the massacre.





"The technique of killing civilians and then first responders when they get there is the primary scenario to win in all the *Grand Theft Auto* games," said Thompson, branding the series a "killing simulator, actually used by gangs."

With the case against Kerns continuing, Thompson will no doubt continue unabated with his attempts to brand the *GTA* series a bad influence. Of course, the fact that his constant attacks are unwittingly providing free advertising for the franchise's next instalment, *San Andreas*, may have passed him by. (Although the chances of this new game being a Thompson target are pretty high.)

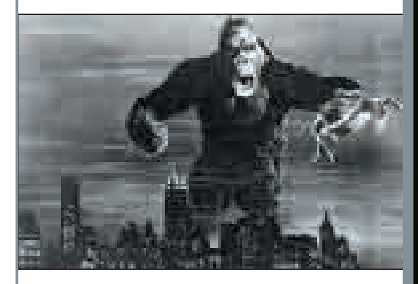
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MONKEY BUSINESS

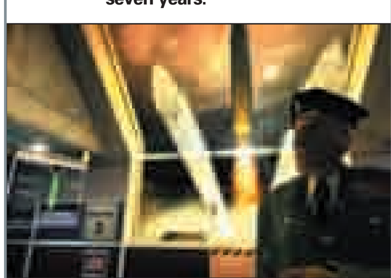
French publisher Ubisoft has announced that it's acquired the rights to develop a game based on Peter Jackson's forthcoming remake of everyone's favourite monkey flick *King Kong*. The game is being worked on by Michel Ancel and his team, who are best known for the bizarre *Rayman* series and *Beyond Good & Evil*. Ancel will be working closely with Ubisoft's Montreal development team – responsible for the *Prince Of Persia* and *Splinter Cell* titles – with input from Peter Jackson's production company, Wingnut Films.





3D REALMS STILL BUSY

Developer 3D Realms is working on a new original game as well as the long-awaited *Duke Nukem Forever*, according to studio president Scott Miller. It's not clear whether the new game referred to by Miller is being worked on in-house at 3D Realms, or if it is a similar deal to Remedy Entertainment's *Max Payne*, where the firm will be working with a third-party studio, rather than doing it all itself. It's nice to see that the developer is up to something other than *Duke Nukem*, which we've been waiting for for seven years.





TAKING THE NEXT STEP

THE BIG THREE ANNOUNCE THE LATEST NEXT-GEN DETAILS

Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo have all been talking about their next hardware ventures, with Sony announcing some data-storage advances. The company has announced that PlayStation3 will use Blu-Ray disc technology, possibly pushing the format into the mainstream in the process.

Where single-sided dual-layer DVDs (the format most commonly used for films) can hold just over 9Gb of data, single-sided dual-layer Blu-Ray discs are capable of storing 54Gb of data thanks to the use of a blue laser, which has a smaller wavelength than standard red and is capable of reading smaller data points.

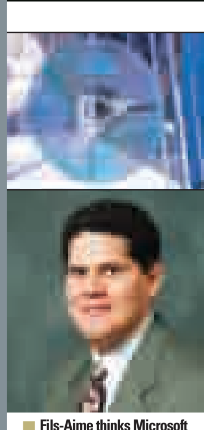
Sony intends to push this new storage medium in the same way it did with DVD when it incorporated that technology into the PS2. While DVD was clearly taking off on its own regardless of PS2 support, Sony believes that many people saw PS2 as a good way to get into DVD for the first time and so the PS3 will give people the same chance to embrace Blu-Ray (which, unlike DVD, can support playback of High Definition encoded video).

Over in Camp Microsoft, Windows gaming general manager Dean Lester has revealed that Xbox 2 peripherals will work on PCs – a further hint that Microsoft intends to bring Windows PCs and Xbox platforms together.

Further details point to the Xbox 2 using a standardised joypad design. Current Xbox peripherals are said to use a 'ruggedised' variation of the common USB standard to connect to the console. Indeed, there has been production of third-party adaptors that allow normal USB devices to be connected to the Xbox. Based on Lester's comments, it is expected that Xbox peripherals will be able to plug straight into PC USB ports as well as into a 'ruggedised' variant on the Xbox 2.

And then there's Nintendo, or, more specifically, the ever-outspoken Reggie Fils-Aime, who has slammed Microsoft for trying to push into the next generation too early. "Not that I want to ignore Xbox, but certainly we believe that a rush to a new system is a mistake," he said. However, in order to run with the pack, Nintendo's next console, codenamed Revolution, will follow the same timeframe for release as Sony's PlayStation3.

Speaking to entertainment website IGN, Fils-Aime said: "We will bring the Revolution to the marketplace roughly at the same time as our competition. We are driving our timetable based on what we believe Sony will do."





Fils-Aime thinks Microsoft is rushing things.



MASTER CHIEF HITS XBOX EARLY

HALO 2 BECOMES AN INSTANT HIT WITH THE PIRATE COMMUNITY

The most anticipated launch of the year had the wind taken out of its sails when *Halo 2* appeared on the internet a month before its shelf date. Copies of Bungie's eagerly awaited sequel turned up on various websites, the first version with a French audio track but other languages quickly became available.

Obviously, Microsoft is not too pleased about the leak, and is now trying to track down the culprits.

"Microsoft has learned that a version of *Halo 2* has been posted to various newsgroups and websites," the company said in an official statement. "We consider downloading this code or making it available for others to download as theft. We are currently investigating the source of this leak with the appropriate authorities. Microsoft takes the integrity of its intellectual property extremely seriously, and we are aggressively pursuing the source of this illegal act."

The Xbox giant reassured gamers that *Halo 2* will still meet its release date, but it is appealing to anyone with information concerning the leak to email piracy@microsoft.com.

Following the problems surrounding the leaking of *Half-Life 2* code, it seems that people are still prepared to go to great lengths to get hold of the latest games. While we're not blaming Bungie, perhaps if Microsoft and the developer had been less secretive about *Halo 2* then the forbidden fruit wouldn't have looked so tasty…

Master Chief is already in unscrupulous homes.

XBOX LIVE SPECTATOR MODE A POSSIBILITY

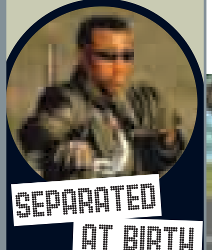
DO YOU LIKE TO WATCH?

Bill Gates has hinted strongly that a Spectator mode will be added to Xbox Live in the future. Speaking during a lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, the Microsoft chairman said that 'Xbox Live TV' was likely to become a reality.

The Spectator mode is something that has already been seen in many PC titles, and would allow people to watch games that are being played over Live without having to take part themselves. As entertaining as it is to watch less gifted players get mauled by the opposition, this feature will help you develop tactics and see how the best go about playing their games. It's also being hinted that Xbox Live TV will boast other enhancements such as new graphics, viewpoints and displays.

Gates made these comments when asked about which Microsoft product he's the most proud of. His reply was that he has a personal interest in developing new interactive features for the Xbox, citing the ability to assemble online audiences to watch games as an example.

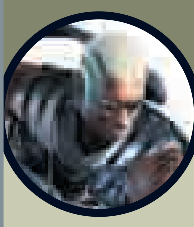
Unfortunately, no date was indicated for the release of Xbox Live TV and it isn't clear whether it will feature on the current Xbox platform or will be implemented in titles for Xbox 2, so we're just going to have to wait and see.



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

Aside from the obvious accident with bottle of peroxide, there can be little doubt that *Tekken 5* newcomer Raven bears more than a passing resemblance to Wesley Snipes as Blade. Chilling.





GAMES ROOM 101

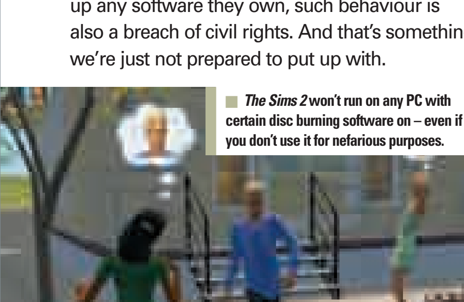
THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO. 25: TO RUN OR NOT TO RUN

Being the honest, law-abiding gamers that we are, the idea of stamping out piracy is one that appeals to us. However, we have to draw the line when efforts to prevent piracy infringe upon our civil liberties – something that's happened a couple of times recently.

Specific examples include *The Sims 2* and *Myst IV: Revelation*, two of several games we've found that take the liberty of scanning your hard drive (without your permission) when you try to play them. Should they find any software that falls into the category of disc replication or even offers the function of a virtual hard disc, they'll shut down completely – only by deleting such software will you be able to enjoy the game you've paid for.

While we can understand the reason behind this, we have to ask the question: who the hell are EA and Ubisoft, among other developers, to tell us what we can or cannot have installed on our PCs? Just because we own such software for legitimate purposes doesn't make us pirates – and considering it's every person's right to back up any software they own, such behaviour is also a breach of civil rights. And that's something we're just not prepared to put up with.



The Sims 2 won't run on any PC with certain disc burning software on – even if you don't use it for nefarious purposes.



Software like Alcohol 120% is perfectly legal, yet many PC games won't load if you own it.

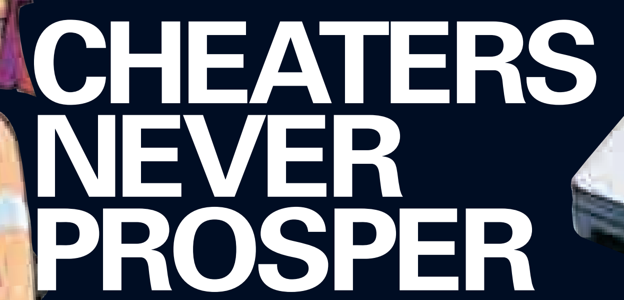
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SAILS CLEAN OVER THE BAR

After what seems like weeks of rumour and speculation, Eidos has finally confirmed that its biggest Christmas title, *Championship Manager 5*, may not even arrive before the New Year. Rumours of the delay originally caused a massive plunge in Eidos' share price late last month, leading to its lowest share price in nearly a year – something that hasn't been helped by the recent confirmation. Unfortunately, such news now gives the game's closest competitor, Sports Interactive's new *Football Manager* title, a clear month to find its feet and gain popularity with fans of the genre. Clearly, Eidos has much catching up to do.



CHEATERS NEVER PROSPER

GAME BOY ADVANCE COUNTERFEITER RECEIVES MASSIVE FINE

An air traffic control assistant has been fined £42,000 for manufacturing and selling counterfeit Game Boy Advance cartridges. Marco Granata, 46, pleaded guilty to 30 counts of trademark offences at Liverpool Crown Court last month.

Granata's house was raided in July 2002 following investigations by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Trading Standards with support from Elspa. He was found to have 668 fake games at his home, as well as equipment from Thailand that would allow him to make many more copies. An examination of his computer revealed that he had made over £24,000 by selling fake games over the internet, and the amount of games found in the house suggested that the counterfeiting was a full-time operation.

Game Boy Advance piracy is becoming increasingly common, with illegal cartridges frequently offered for sale on the web, but this was the first time that Elspa had encountered such a large-scale operation in the UK.

"Elspa is determined to stamp out computer and videogames piracy around the country," said Roger Bennett, Elspa's director general. "This result shows that in the long run, pirates do not profit from their illegal activities."

Piracy continues to be a thorn in the industry's side, and while it's encouraging to see such a large fine being handed out to a software counterfeiter, we're unsure as to how effective a deterrent this will be. After all, for those pirates that don't get caught, there's clearly a lot of money to be made.

■ No more playing great GBA games for you, Mr Granata…

MIDWAY GOES SHOPPING

MIDWAY ACQUIRES INEVITABLE ENTERTAINMENT

Midway Games has announced it has completely taken over Inevitable Entertainment, one of its development partners, and will rename the Texas-based firm Midway Studios Austin.

Midway acquired the upcoming developer in exchange for 218,421 common shares, valued at just over $2 million, while an extra 152,824 restricted shares worth $1.4 million were given to 11 key employees on the condition they stay with the firm for the next three years.

Inevitable Entertainment is currently developing first-person shooter *Area 51* for Midway. The game has been slated for release sometime in the first half of 2005 and has apparently been optioned as a possible movie release from Paramount. Previously, Inevitable Entertainment was responsible for online PS2 shooter *Tribes Aerial Assault*.

Midway seems to be on something of a shopping spree at the moment – it bought Surreal Software (developer of horror shooter *The Suffering*) back in April. The purchase of Inevitable Entertainment fulfils Midway's pledge to open a studio in Austin, Texas, although it's not known whether Midway plans to locate more teams at the new site.



Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH Nintendo's VP of sales and marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime, discusses the advantages of owning a wireless handheld:



"I'm no technie poseur, but the reaction I received made me kind of feel like I belonged. For the moment, I was cool."

games™ says: Reggie, face facts – you'll never be cool. Particularly if you're going to refer to your Blackberry handheld as a 'crackberry'. Will you never learn?

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

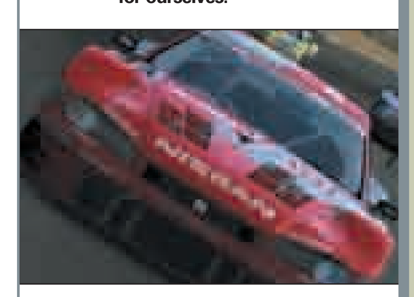


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



THE RACE IS ON

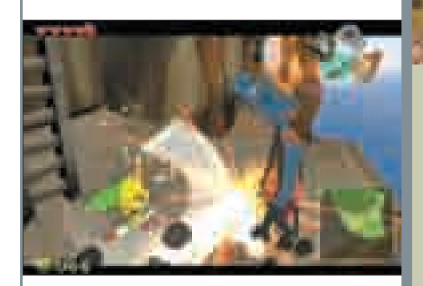
Microsoft's supposed answer to Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo* series, *Forza Motorsport*, has finally been given an official release date. It's been confirmed that the game has received a February 2005 release slot in the UK. Although we were all expecting a release before Christmas, this can't really been seen as a delay, as Microsoft had previously suggested that we wouldn't see the game until late 2005. *Forza* was met with mixed reactions from those that saw it at Game Stars Live in September, but we'll have to wait a little longer to judge for ourselves.

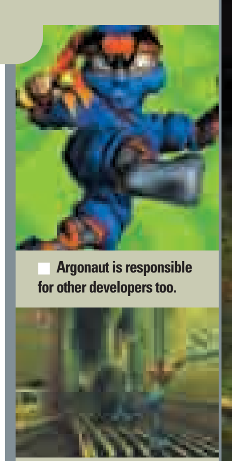




CHEAP AS CHIPS

The GameCube is proving to be the best value console on the market. Not only is it the cheapest hardware, but another 30 games have been added to the budget Player's Choice range. For £20 you can already snap up titles like *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Metroid Prime*, and now the likes of *Wind Waker, Soul Calibur II, F-Zero GX* and *Mario Party 5* are going for a song. Third-party titles added to the range include *Harry Potter Quidditch World Cup, Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King* and *Need For Speed Underground.*





Argonaut is responsible for other developers too.

Malice has been held up for ages. Will a release help?



MORE DOOM AND GLOOM FOR MAJOR UK DEVELOPER

ALL FOR (ARGO)NAUGHT

British developers are still having a tough time, and now the clouds have settled over one of the country's largest independent studios. Argonaut Games, best known for successful collaborations with Nintendo during the SNES era as well as recent titles such as *I-Ninja* and *Carve*, has seen its shares suspended on the London Stock Exchange following a warning from the company over concerns of major financial difficulties.

According to the statement issued by Argonaut last month, it has experienced a number of delays in the signing of key development contracts with publishers, which in turn has meant a lack of revenue. With no money coming in, the company warned that it doesn't have long before its cash reserves run dry; a precarious position for any developer to be in. "In the absence of these development agreements being immediately secured," warned Argonaut's statement, "the group's existing cash resources will provide funding for only an extremely limited period and Argonaut may not be able to continue to trade."

Unfortunately, the news isn't limited to Argonaut – it also runs three other studios across the country (Just Add Monsters, Particle Systems and LTStudios), as well as mobile games developer Morpheme. Although the developer's recent success could hardly be termed as considerable, continued releases have ensured its survival. The closure of a company of Argonaut's size is the last thing that the UK industry needs.

CHRISTMAS RUSH BEGINS IN EARNEST

BRACE THE MAIN SALES



Fable has proved to be the stuff of legend.

The summer drought of games has clearly put gamers in a buying mood, with the first wave of triple-A titles for the Christmas season performing particularly well for their respective platforms. Taking the lead, not surprisingly, is Nintendo's release of the latest Pokémon titles, *Fire Red* and *Leaf Green*, at the beginning of October. Combined with the drop in price for the GBA SP (which is now £69.99), the titles performed spectacularly well, selling over 250,000 between them across Europe in the first two days of release; enough to silence critics who say the demand for Pokémon is on the wane.

Microsoft also saw similar success with its long-awaited fantasy epic *Fable*, which managed to sell well over 30,000 copies in the UK alone, propelling it straight to the top of the Xbox charts. While this is good news for developers Lionhead and Big Blue Box, the addition of having it become the fastest selling Xbox game in Europe will no doubt come as a bonus. "We're very excited that so many gamers are experiencing the world of Albion in *Fable*," said Michel Cassius, Microsoft's senior director for Xbox platform and marketing. "This title is a great example of how the Xbox portfolio is broadening, encompassing titles for the committed gamer as well as more casual gamers."



FROM BOY GENIUS TO EVIL GENIUS, DEMIS HASSABIS HAS CREATED BEST-SELLING GAMES, WORKED WITH PETER MOLYNEUX AND SET UP HIS OWN STUDIO. AND HE'S STILL YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE, WELL, YOUR SMART YOUNGER BROTHER…



"BY THE TIME I LOOK BACK ON MY CAREER I WANT TO HAVE MADE SOME KIND OF DIFFERENCE TO THE GAMES INDUSTRY AND TO HAVE LEFT BEHIND SOME LANDMARK GAMES THAT PEOPLE REALLY ENJOYED"

DEMIS HASSABIS, ELIXIR STUDIOS

DEMIS HASSABIS

ELIXIR STUDIOS

Saying goodbye to the day job to start up your own company is one of the toughest decisions anyone could ever make. But as Elixir Studios founder, chairman and creative director Demis Hassabis will testify, it's the only way to get things just the way you want them. "I set [Elixir] up because I had the ideas in my mind for the games I wanted to make – *Republic* and *Evil Genius* being two of them – and the most likely way I was going to get to make them was to basically have my own company," he says. "The thing that people tell you is it's always going to be harder than you think. I went into it knowing it was going to be harder than I was thinking it was going to be… but it was harder than that even. It was harder than I ever imagined."

Hassabis is used to challenges; he taught himself chess at four years old, and at 12 was the highest-ranking player of his age in the world. He finished his A-levels at 15. At 17 co-created *Theme Park* with videogame veteran Peter Molyneux. And before helping Molyneux set up Lionhead Studios, Hassabis picked up a double first in computer science from Cambridge University. Surely setting up his own studio would be a cinch?

As Hassabis explains, the biggest challenges were rooted in Elixir's first game – the deeply ambitious and complex *Republic*. "The thing that really made [setting up Elixir] harder was that *Republic* was so ambitious, and then there's the technology – the technology was ambitious as well," he says. "If I were to do it again I would never build a game at the same time as the technology." But this wasn't the only hurdle. Elixir was a new company and, as such, was populated with staff fairly new to the business – a problem when you're trying to produce a game as complicated as *Republic*. "We had a lot of creativity and a lot of very good technical people, but we just didn't have people who had shipped out game after game," Hassabis explains.

Not only was Elixir trying to find its feet and understand what worked best, it was tasked with producing a highly ambitious game while at the same time inventing all-new, boundary-pushing technology. And as Hassabis concurs, the fruit of Elixir's five-year labour didn't turn out exactly the way it should have done. "It needed another six months really to just polish it," he says. "We never got a chance to polish the interface, or the content or the pacing – the learning curve was vertical. We knew [the learning curve] was wrong but there was no more time to do anything about it – we had to release it for that financial quarter."

For Elixir's second game things had to change, and Hassabis looked to shake things up a little. "When we started our team for *Evil Genius* we sort of looked at what we'd done wrong with *Republic* in terms of its development process and clearly we didn't want to work on another five-year project," he says. "It's bad obviously from our financial point of view but also creatively you can get stagnant after two or three years. We took a long hard look at why that happened [with *Republic*] and the main reasons were some inexperienced beliefs (especially on the programming side), not enough production skills and building the game at the same time as unbelievably ambitious technology. All those things we basically corrected at that point and that makes for quite a different environment now. It's paid off and *Evil Genius* is the first proof."

With the hardship of setting up the company behind him, Hassabis is looking to the future, with three unannounced games currently in varying stages of development. "We've got lots of different plans, we've got a couple of very ambitious titles in the works [and] another signed game with a massive publisher that's actually going to be our next game," he reveals. And note the use of the word 'ambitious'. Even after having his fingers burnt by *Republic*, isn't Hassabis committing himself to 'safe' titles? "By the time I look back on my career [I want] to have made some kind of difference to the games industry and to have left behind some landmark games that people really enjoyed," he says. We'll take that as a 'no'.

Evil Genius for PC is out now and was reviewed last issue.



LIVE AID

THE AMOUNT OF GAMES SUPPORTING XBOX LIVE CONTINUES TO GROW, THOUGH NOT ALL OF THEM ARE AS GOOD AS YOU MIGHT HAVE HOPED. ONCE AGAIN, GAMES™ BRAVES THE BEST (AND WORST) OF XBOX LIVE TO GIVE YOU AN INFORMED OPINION ON WHAT YOU SHOULD BE PLAYING

It's been almost a year since we last cast an eye over the state of Xbox Live, but even we're surprised by how far the service has evolved since then. Twelve months ago we could go some way to understanding the apathy felt by many Xbox owners towards the service – the games that made use of online play were decent, but few could be declared true killer apps. Now, though, there are so many quality titles (some with online modes good enough to eclipse the offline ones) that having Xbox Live is almost as important as owning the console itself.

Some things, unfortunately, haven't changed: the price, availability and quality of broadband, for example, still isn't nearly as consumer-friendly as perhaps it should be. However, with more companies starting to offer console-compatible broadband, now's the ideal time to get your Xbox online – particularly as the range of current titles (not to mention those coming in the next few months) will have you playing for months on end.

We've been giving the following titles more than enough of our spare time to know whether they're worth your attention or not, so hopefully our advice should be of some use if you're not sure which one to go for. You never know, if you know where to look, you might even catch us online.

TRIED & TESTED

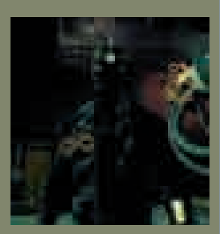
GAME ONE

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMOROW

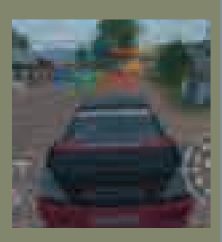
You've got to hand it to Ubisoft – at least it made an effort with the online side of *Pandora Tomorrow*; it's almost like an entirely different game from the single-player adventure. Pitting third-person stealthy spies against first-person gun-toting mercenaries, the exact objective changes depending on which side you're on and the mode you're playing. However, the atmosphere is one thing that remains constant – the perpetual sense that you're being followed when you're a mercenary, the 'hold your breath' feeling of staying hidden as a spy – and it's this that makes the game so appealing. Against the smash-mouth styling of most other Live titles, *Pandora Tomorrow*'s emphasis on stealth comes as a breath of fresh air

Unfortunately, while the gameplay is incredibly tense and will keep you interested for a long while, the game's limitations make the whole thing somewhat frustrating. For starters, you can only have up to four people playing at once with two on each side – a fair balance, considering the intentionally sneaky nature of the action, but not nearly enough people to induce a proper multiplayer feeling (especially since you can only communicate with your team-mate mid-game). There are also only three game modes, all of which involve pretty much the same goals, which can make the thought of playing for extended periods of time less of an enticing prospect. It's a shame, because *Pandora Tomorrow* would otherwise find itself so much higher on our list of Xbox Live games that we simply must play.

VERDICT 6/10
ABSORBING BUT RATHER LIMITED



"IT'S A SHAME THAT PANDORA TOMORROW **DOESN'T HAVE MORE GAME MODES,** BECAUSE IT'S **WELL CRAFTED OTHERWISE**"



"RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2 MANAGES TO **TAKE A FAIRLY LONELY GENRE** AND TURN IT INTO A **DECENT ONLINE EXPERIENCE**"

GAME TWO

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

A 16-player rally game may not sound like the best idea for an online title given the nature of rally driving, but Digital Illusions CE has managed to rework the online mode to offer a quality driving experience. The first thing you'll notice when playing is just how stable the servers are and how smoothly everything runs. Maybe we've just been playing too much *OutRun 2* and *Burnout 3*, but it's a pleasant surprise to know that the people you're racing against will all be waiting for you back in the lobby when a game ends rather than scrabbling to find new games.

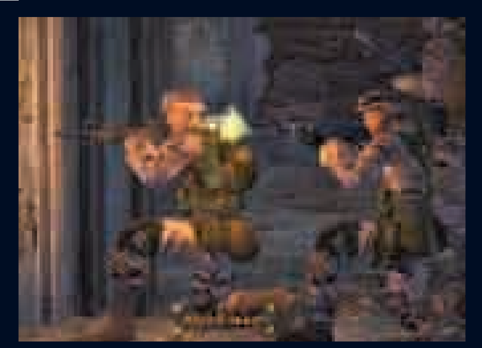
Sadly, one of the biggest problems with *RalliSport* is that its tracks aren't designed for a massive amount of cars to race on at any one time. To combat this problem, DICE wisely decided to make all your opponents wireframe so that you can race through each other and not have to worry about a ridiculous pile-up on the first corner. There's still an option to play with solid cars, but it's been sensibly limited to only a small amount, and while there can be problems, it's nothing like the chaos that would have ensued had the developer allowed 16 solid racers on the track.

In all our time of playing the game online, we've only noticed minimal amounts of lag and no drop in the game's performance whatsoever. Add in the solid XSN brand (which is sadly no more) that allows you to set up some great competitive leagues and you have yet another success story for Xbox Live.

VERDICT 8/10
A HIGHLY POLISHED EXAMPLE OF ONLINE RACING

LOCK AND DOWNLOAD

More downloadable content for those Live titles



Those of you who've finished *Full Spectrum Warrior* will be interested in Epilogue 1, the game's first downloadable mission. Adding an elite Army Ranger unit spices up the action, though we're not convinced it's enough to warrant charging for it.



By contrast, *RalliSport Challenge 2*'s latest download offers more than enough – four new cars (two vintage and two SUVs), two new career modes (Mountain and Arena Challenges) and two new paint jobs for all 43 cars. All for free. Bargain.



If you're used to downloading *Rainbow Six 3* maps for free, you're in for a nasty surprise – the next pack of four levels (entitled Assault Pack 1) will set you back £3. Shame it doesn't fix any of the bugs…

TRIED & TESTED

GAME THREE

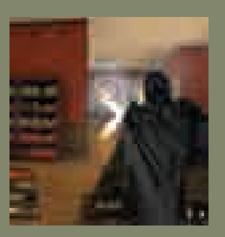
RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW

At £20, *Black Arrow* was arguably the bargain of the year and a timely filler to tide us over until the announcement of *Rainbow Six 4*. Serving as an add-on to the most popular game on Xbox Live, *Black Arrow* built upon the gameplay of its predecessor by adding new modes (Total Conquest, Lone Rush and Retrieval), while also being the first game to take advantage of Xbox Live 3.0 functionality. Though the core components that made the original so great still work on *Black Arrow*, the additions frequently disappoint.

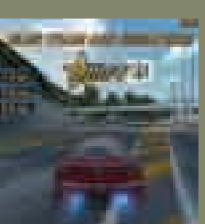
The much-vaunted clan matches have quickly lost favour, thanks to some nefarious goings on where some cads purposefully slow a contest's frame rate to a snail's pace. This completely ruins what could have been *Black Arrow*'s greatest strength and it's bitterly disappointing that such a potentially exciting part of the Xbox Live experience has been ruined. Likewise, some unsporting spawn camping and the occasional disappearance of a team-mate can also mar Total Conquest. Retrieval has also suffered a similar fate thanks to a bug that occasionally makes the sought-after canister occasionally evaporate, leaving teams with no option other than to quit out and start again. We suspect that most of these problems could be fixed via a downloadable patch, but so far this has failed to materialise, leaving much of the game's potential untapped. At such a low price, however, *Black Arrow* remains a worthwhile purchase, but until Ubisoft addresses the bugs that hamper such an otherwise excellent game, it can't be seen as an Xbox Live essential.

VERDICT 7/10

A FLAWED DIAMOND IN THE XBOX LIVE CROWN



"RAINBOW SIX 3 **HAS ALWAYS BEEN A NECESSITY FOR XBOX LIVE**, AND BLACK ARROW DOESN'T CHANGE THAT OPINION"



"IF ONLY EA'S ONLINE SERVICE WASN'T SO PATCHY, **BURNOUT 3 WOULD BE ONE OF THE BEST** LIVE TITLES AROUND"

GAME FOUR

BURNOUT 3

Undoubtedly, we stand firm on scoring *Burnout 3* a full ten out of ten two months ago, if only because we're still playing it and having just as much fun now as we were when it first came out. However, while we find it almost impossible to fault the gameplay offered by the entire game (both online and offline), it's undeniable that the online experience is far from perfect; a fact that can only be pinned squarely on the shoulders of EA's somewhat lacklustre Live service.

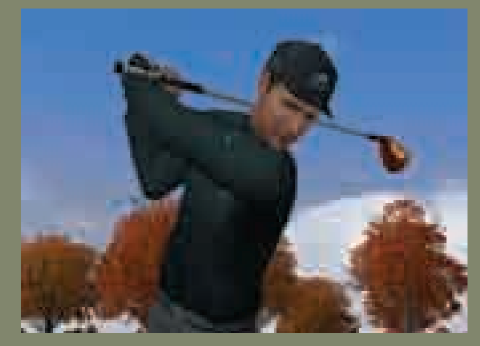
Certainly, the problems currently being experienced by players are nowhere near as severe as those seen when the game was released, although the fact that any remain even after several months of play is cause for concern. Even now, we still experience instances of being booted out of games for no good reason, as well as an inability to find our friends even though they're playing at the same time – problems that really shouldn't exist this far down the line, especially considering how many people have bought into the game.

As we said, though, it's the service that's the problem and not the gameplay. Once you manage to actually find your friends online, get into a game and not get booted out to the Lobby, the experience on offer is one that's hard to put down (until you're forced to by the servers, that is). Indeed, the need for a few additional modes aside *Burnout 3* still stands out as one of our favourite online games. We just wish EA hadn't messed up in the first place.

VERDICT 7/10

GREAT GAMEPLAY SPOILT BY DISAPPOINTING SERVICE

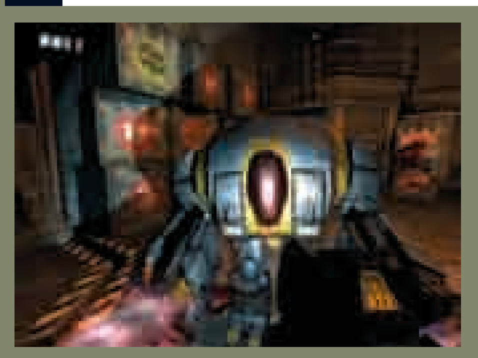
MISSING IN ACTION Live-worthy games that missed the boat



No excuses for EA here – the US release of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005* for the Xbox has online play, so ripping it out for the PAL release is nothing short of criminal. Yet another reason why EA and Xbox Live don't mix.



Red Dead Revolver's multiplayer mode, pitting players against each other in arena-style shoot-outs using unlockable characters, would have worked incredibly well over Xbox Live. Why Rockstar passed up the opportunity is a mystery.



Dark, dingy corridors with plenty of places to hide, some meaty firepower and all the atmosphere you could ever need; the fact that *Chronicles Of Riddick* didn't have a multiplayer mode (and thus anything to play over Live) was definitely disappointing.

GAME FIVE

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

Offline, *Battlefront* could be described as a mildly diverting but rather limited affair. Underpinning the game, of course, is the most alluring movie licence in history, and the chance to relive key moments from the *Star Wars* movies easily glosses over what is a fairly simplistic and, at times, unrewarding experience. Replace the limited AI of the bots with your mates online, however, and the game gets a new lease of life. Again, the licence plays a part in this, but it's not the only reason for *Battlefront*'s success.

Closely mirroring the gameplay mechanic of *Battlefield*, the scale and scope of the game only really come to life on Xbox Live. The freedom to go where you want or control any vehicle offers a wealth of opportunities; couple that with the pleasure of conquest and the impressive number of bots running about on either side and you have a Live experience unlike any other. We suspect that *Battlefront*'s time in the limelight will be short-lived, as *Halo 2* looks set to eclipse it by being a more complete and diverse Live game, but this doesn't mean this game should be overlooked.

VERDICT 8/10

PLAY NOW, LEAVE SOON, BUT RETURN TO IT YOU WILL

GAME SIX

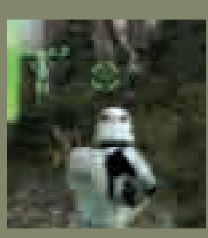
OUTRUN 2

While we're still enjoying powersliding and unlocking those final few extras in Mission mode, *OutRun 2* online has left us rather disillusioned. Lag in driving games is always a potential hazard, but it's particularly frequent in *OutRun 2* and ruins an otherwise enjoyable online experience. We can accept the fact that your opponent is given a ridiculous boost when you've driven into his back bumper, but the subsequent teleporting of his car from one side of the road to the other isn't so forgiveable.

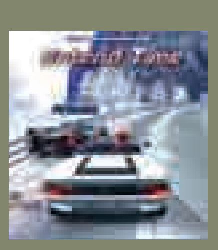
Play the game with a small number of people (up to four) and these problems pretty much disappear. It's only once you play with six or eight people that games become a real mess with more random teleporting, huge amounts of lag and an extremely low frame rate. Time Trials have also been causing us headaches. Although racing on the single tracks is generally faultless, the reversed tracks or complete routes are a different matter. There's nothing worse then thrashing the online ghost you've just downloaded and then realising your new score hasn't uploaded to the online scoreboard; a complete pain that spoils an otherwise excellent online system.

VERDICT 6/10

A FUN RACER, LET DOWN BY ANNOYING FAULTS



"YES, YOU CAN **ACTUALLY BE A STORM TROOPER** AND FOR US, THAT'S MORE THAN ENOUGH TO **CONVINCE US TO PLAY BATTLEFRONT**"



"WHEREAS OUTRUN 2'S **OFFLINE PLAY IS EXTREMELY ABSORBING,** WE'VE BEEN **LEFT COLD BY THE CONTRAST** OF ITS ONLINE OFFERING"

CONCLUSION



THE STATE OF PLAY

MICROSOFT CONTINUES TO MOVE AHEAD

Xbox Live is a different beast from the one that was unleashed just over a year and a half ago; we've seen it evolve from a tentative step into online console gaming into something that we now couldn't be without. This, of course, is primarily down to Microsoft's attempts to push the service whenever possible. Having expanded its European reach to 14 different countries and touched the gaming lives of over one million Xbox users worldwide, the company is clearly determined to make Xbox Live a success. By the end of 2004, over 150 Xbox Live-enabled games will be widely available and the added benefits of Xbox Live 3.0 (including clan options, messaging functions and the ability to link your Gamertag to the PC and Mac versions of MSN Messenger) make the system as user-friendly and accessible to gamers as you could possibly hope for.

However, there's still one potential threat to the success of Xbox Live – the PlayStation2's Network Play system. Admittedly it's not hard to see that in a technical sense at least, Microsoft has the edge over Sony with Xbox Live offering far more facilities than its nearest competitor. What's more, the added weight of publisher support from companies such as EA (albeit in a limited form) and Konami (through *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*) will certainly bolster the network's popularity. However, the PlayStation2 still remains the more popular machine among consumers, and the fact that the newly redesigned PS2 comes with a Network Adapter built in proves that Sony is determined to claw back at least some of the online market for itself. This could, of course, be bad news for Microsoft; as has been proven in the past, what Sony wants Sony generally gets.



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"I REALLY LIKE TO KILL THINGS WITH GUNS. BUT MAN CANNOT LIVE THE DOUGHY AND MALLEABLE HAVOK 2 BODIES OF HIS

Shooting. That's all I do now. There was a time when my games diet was healthier, more balanced, more varied. A little jumping-on-heads calcium, a little monkey-catching vitamin C, the recommended daily allowance of driving-fast-stuff protein and a blood-thinning dose of stealing-cars-and-bikes zinc. Now it's a non-stop, gluttonous quadruple entrée of big, fluffy, starchy shooting-people carbs. Utterly guilty pleasure. It's time to go all Dr Phil and make some changes.

Observe this list: *Black Arrow*, *Star Wars Battlefront*, *Men Of Valor*, *Big Game Hunter 2005 Adventure*, *Halo 2*, *Call Of Duty*, *Ghost Recon 2*. That's the entire list of games I'll be playing between now and Christmas. As happened to the PC many moons ago, the acme of development on the consoles now lies in the first-person shooter. That's where the dollars are being spent. That's where the excitement is. And gosh darn it, I really like to hurt and kill things with guns. But man cannot live by gloriously spitting lead into the doughy and malleable Havok 2 bodies of his enemies alone. Jesus said that in the New Testament (Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4), although I may be paraphrasing slightly.

So when my path crossed that of Bugbear Entertainment's physics-led racer *FlatOut*, with its fresh, irreverent take on automotive challenge, I knew that this would be the very tonic for a bullet-ridden hangover. It would be like *Test Drive: Eve Of Destruction* for a mature audience not wowed by the sorry post-Knoxville exploitation of redneck 'culture'. With a release date set for 5 November, this little wonder would come just at the right time to offset the heaviest phase of the pre-Christmas FPS jizzathon.

I began the auto-hype process, the pre-release ritual of self-excitement where you stoke the fire of desire with information, coaxing the flames to dangerous heights with every potent tidbit of existing knowledge on the product. I wheedled details out of press friends. I downloaded dozens of little movies in nasty formats regarded contemptuously by my computer. I read and read and read. I watched developer interviews on Tilt TV. Mined the official website hard, more than once. The footage rolled, the music pumped, the heart swelled.

The cars take damage just right; their bodywork crumpling, losing doors, windows and hoods! You can crash properly, flipping cars over, unlike 98 per cent of current racers! When you hit a pile of logs at the roadside, they disperse believably! In fact, every object and flying piece of scrap is governed by crazy-good physics! By God, there's a chuffing ragdoll driver who comes smashing through the windscreen when you crash! It'll play like *Rally Cross* but with gnarly fatalities! There are even mini-games built around said driver, where you slam into a wall at the bottom of a giant ramp and see how far you can eject the little sucker! Yes, yes and yes! 5 November couldn't come fast enough.



BY GLORIOUSLY SPITTING LEAD INTO ENEMIES ALONE. JESUS SAID THAT"

Then came the announcement from Bugbear. It was very happy about finding a publisher in 'the North America' (it's Finnish), namely Vivendi Universal. The US release would take place in the first quarter of 2005 'to ensure a good launch'. It turns out the 5 November street date quoted by everyone, everywhere – including American sources – is for Empire Interactive's British release of *FlatOut*.

The disappointment could scarcely have been worse had I received a letter from the government saying they were pushing my birthday back a while. It might seem arrogant, because it is, but there's a certain assumption that, at worst, we'll get a game here at least around the same time as the PAL territories (and normally well in advance). Australia got *Burnout 3* first. Britain got *OutRun 2* almost a month ahead. Now you're getting *FlatOut* first, and it's gone from an excited little 'Pick up *FlatOut*' note on the calendar in my kitchen, a saviour from simulated war for the holiday season, to a vague, non-committal 'Q1 2005' on some bastard's spreadsheet at Vivendi.

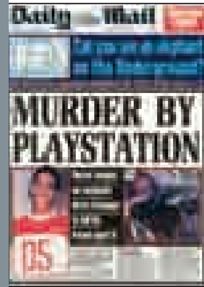
Also, *Yager* just came out. *Yager*. Do you know how long ago you all got that? It's so old nobody's interested any more and they've had to tag it at $20. Seriously, if this happens again, I'm coming back home. I didn't move here to get fat and go to Walmart.

Many thanks



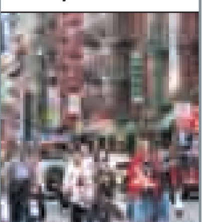
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Daily Mail outrage



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Bowery, Chinatown, NYC

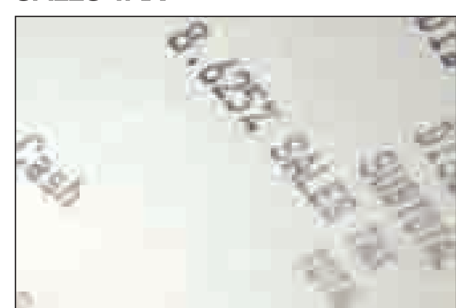


WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

SALES TAX

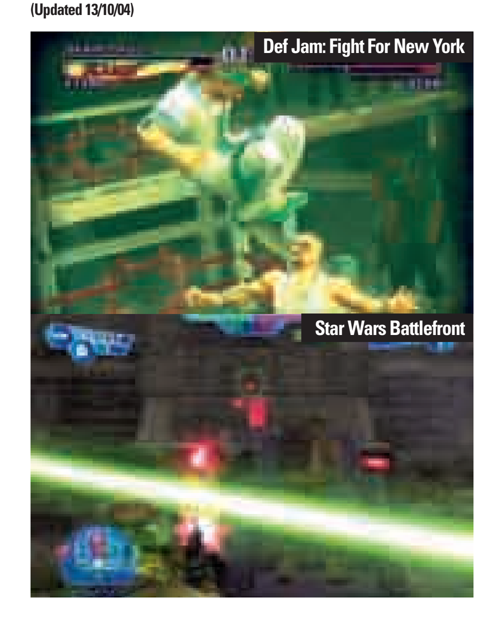


You're at the mall and find that CD you've been looking for. The sticker says $14.99. You've got $15 left. Sound. You reach the register. The spotty man says, "$15.89". Shit. Welcome to sales tax. Some stores include it in the price tag, some don't. Super.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	PS2
2	Def Jam: Fight For New York	EA Games	PS2
3	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	Xbox
4	Madden NFL 2005	EA Sports	PS2
5	NBA Live 2005	EA Sports	PS2
6	Fable	Microsoft	Xbox
7	Street Racing Syndicate	Namco	PS2
8	Shellshock: Nam '67	Eidos	PS2
9	Def Jam: Fight For New York	EA Games	Xbox
10	Vietcong: Purple Haze	Take 2	PS2

(Updated 13/10/04)


Def Jam: Fight For New York

Star Wars Battlefront



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"I HAVE NO IMPRESSIONS OF DRAGON QUEST VIII FOR PS2 – THE AT A FOUR-HOUR WAIT FOR ALL THREE DAYS

Mickey Mouse – Disney icon and creator of the uber-queue.

On the first night of the Tokyo Game Show 2004, Koei hosted a party at Tokyo Disneyland, full of gaming journalists from publications from all corners of the globe except Japan. Last year at this same party, I was hungry and chanced upon a boulder of bread. I sank my teeth into it only to find it was full of squishy squid-meat. I sent a glib email about it to one of the Koei PR fellows, and he got the joke. This year, there was no squid-meat to be had at the party. I dined on wonderful pancakes and excellent vegetarian-friendly cheese sandwiches while Koei talked about its upcoming game line-up. I wasn't really listening about the games – neither was anyone else. They were all too busy being already-drunk on free cocktails.

After an hour of banqueting, we were released into Tokyo Disneyland on a night pass. It was then that I was filled with horror. My friends and I could not believe it – Disneyland was shoulder-to-shoulder full of Japanese day-tourists. There was barely any room to move. How the procession toward the Magic Kingdom moved, I don't know – some force, perhaps steam power, was pushing us gently from behind. It felt like being crammed into a rush-hour train. The wait to ride Space Mountain was, I kid you not, a whole five hours.

Now, I've waited three hours to ride a rollercoaster once before. That was years ago, though. I was a thrill-seeker, and the rollercoaster was a newly built one, in Ohio of all places. It intrigued me to take a long drive out into the country with friends and good music in my car, to ride rollercoasters. We had come a long way to see big things. Here in Japan, I took a 20-minute train ride from Tokyo Game Show to see those rollercoasters and I couldn't even ride them. I, as a human being, refuse to wait five hours to ride a damn rollercoaster unless I've paid for it. Hell, I won't wait five hours for anything that lasts less than ten minutes (here I could insert a parenthetical joke about last Saturday night… if I felt like talking about it).

A Japanese friend tells me the Japanese are different. "It's just how they are. They like Disneyland that much. My cousin's daughter goes to Disneyland twice a month, she likes it that much." Her cousin's daughter is in her twenties.

"I'm not talking about liking Disney," I said. "I'm talking about good sense. There's a point where they should start telling people, 'Hey, we're full right now. Find something else to do.'"

My friend laughed at this. "That's not good business." So there you have it – common sense is not good business in Japan. This explains why I come to you this month with no impressions whatsoever of *Dragon Quest VIII* for PlayStation2 – the line was stuck at a four-hour wait for the three days of the



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON TWENTY FIVE:	WAITING IN LINE
Hai, sumimasen – nankai kiita koto aru kamoshirenai keredo ore wa PURESU desu	Hey, sorry – you've probably heard this plenty of times, but I'm PRESS
Aa, moshiwake gozaimasen!!	Uh-huh
IGIRISU no ZASSHI no KORAMU no tame ni DoraKue EITO wo PUREEEEeeeE shitemitain desu kedo…	I would like to play *Dragon Quest VIII* for the purpose of a COLUMN for a MAGAZINE from ENGLAND
Aa, moshiwake gozaimasen!!	Yeah, I bet
Dakara, chotto, yorshikereba, isogashii kara…	So, uh, if you could, please, because I'm busy (let me cut ahead in the line)…
Aa, moshiwake gozaimasen!!	Get the hell out of here before I call the cops

LINE TO PLAY IT WAS STUCK OF THE TOKYO GAME SHOW"

show. Being that I had places to be that required me to never stay still for more than, say, an hour at a time, it was impossible for me to play the game.

An email came from the Tokyo Game Show publicity association just two days after the show, stating all kinds of figures for me to quote in this humble publication. One of those figures was the record attendance number. Out of slightly chilled spite, I will paraphrase it rather than quote it: too damned many people.

Here's my plea to those responsible – have more kiosks at Tokyo Game Show, hire less booth girls (many of your attendees are girls already – encourage them to wear bikinis if you have to) and buy some more TVs. The people are here to play the games, not to have poisonous smoke blown in their eyes while trying to watch a trailer (thanks, Sony). And who knows – if word gets out that Tokyo Game Show is actually a lot of fun (and not just a series of queues), you might break an attendance record again.

Kind regards



SWEET HOME INDIANA

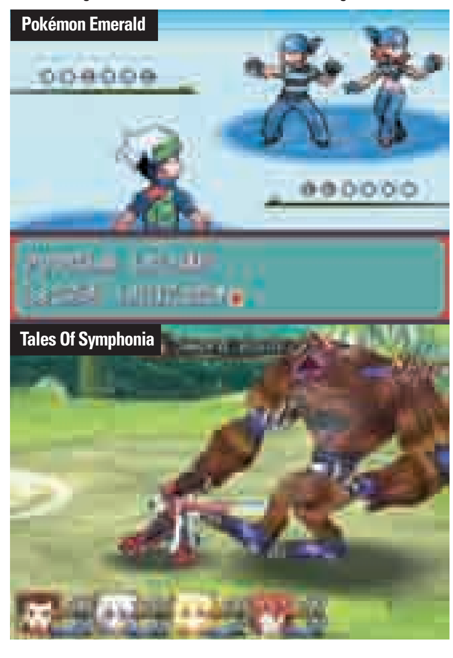
The president of Koei's retail branch, Mr. Michihiro Ito, used to live in the city where I went to college in Indiana. He couldn't believe me when I started quoting the names of places and restaurants. In Japan, where I'm so often dismayed to find that a Japanese person who'd lived in Los Angeles did so for three years without once tasting El Pollo Loco's fine burritos, I was shocked by Mr. Ito's experience with La Charreada Restaurant on 17th and Walnut. "I'd love to retire there some day," he told me.

How we got to this conversation topic, I'm not sure. We were talking about how well Koei had benefited from the burning down of the Yamagiwa building in Akihabara, which had happened just the day after superstore AsoBitCity announced it was closing. We had been talking about how Koei looks forward to the opening of the Yodobashi store in off-strip Akihabara, and what it stands to gain from this first ever large corporate store to open in Akihabara. He then asked me, "So, you live in Japan, right? What about your parents?" And that's how Indiana came up. Yes, it is a 'small world'.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Naruto: Narutimate Hero 2	Bandai	PS2
2	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	GBA
3	Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	PS2
4	Samurai Warriors: Mosho Den	Koei	PS2
5	ZOIDS VS III	Nintendo	GC
6	Kengo 3	Genki	PS2
7	Sgt Keroro Meromero Battle Royal	Bandai	PS2
8	Famicom Mini: Mario Bros. 2	Nintendo	GBA
9	FMA: Demon Of The Red Elixir	Bandai	PS2
10	Pachinko Slot! Fist Of North Star	Sammy	PS2

(Week ending 03/10/04 © 2004 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)


Pokémon Emerald

Tales Of Symphonia



> **"CAPCOM SHOWED ME THE PROJECT PLAN FOR MINISH CAP AND I HAD A STRONG FEELING THAT THIS WAS GOING TO BE A GREAT GAME"**
> *EIJI AONUMA, PRODUCER, NINTENDO JAPAN*

EIJI AONUMA

NINTENDO JAPAN

Pressure. Can you feel it, pressing down like a lead weight, the hopes of thousands of gamers on your shoulders? Eiji Aonuma can. As the producer responsible for the future of the *Zelda* series, he not only has to fill the big shoes left by Shigeru Miyamoto, but perhaps outgrow them. But having been promoted to such a position after working on *The Wind Waker*, Aonuma is familiar with the stress caused by working with Nintendo's Hyrulian hero.

"The time I've felt the most pressure while working on *Zelda* was the project planning phase before we started production on *Wind Waker*, especially when we could not decide on a new idea which would excite not only fans of *Zelda* series, but also new players," recalls Aonuma. "When we think of a new *Zelda* sequel, we initially exchange our ideas. What's most important when we evaluate these ideas is to make sure that they help create the same kind of responsive, intuitive interactive character that we've inherited from the very first game created by Miyamoto."

Of course, new ideas are what have been driving the *Zelda* name forward for years, with each game introducing unique concepts that have helped give each title a distinctive character; it's just the creation of these ideas that proves most taxing. Fortunately for Aonuma, having Capcom on development duties for *Minish Cap* gave him some breathing room. "Thankfully, it was Capcom that proposed its new ideas for *Minish Cap* instead of me," he admits, "so I didn't feel very much pressure, although I could feel the fun in it even at the early stage of development." However, that didn't mean that he could sit back and let Capcom get on with it – after all, it's a producer's job to question every decision made during the development process.

"The core feature in *Minish Cap* is that Link can change his size to go between the normal and Minish worlds," says Aonuma, "and initially I was thinking that the difference between the two worlds is more suitable to 3D expression and would be quite difficult to realise through the 2D expressions of the Game Boy Advance. However, the 2D world created by Capcom for *Minish Cap* has exceeded the image possibilities in 3D and I was impressed by Capcom's capability to create a certain world of images. Moreover, the created worlds are balanced well as the game progresses and it leads players forward without leaving them bored. In the final stages of development, we paid a great deal of attention to keep the realisation of these ideas in a good balance."

With *Minish Cap* now completed, Aonuma's attentions have moved elsewhere; specifically, to the upcoming GameCube *Zelda* title that has fans drooling like children in a sweet shop. The massive change of direction in the visual style is the biggest attraction for some, given the negative comments levelled at *Wind Waker* upon its unveiling. Where we once had Link in all his cel-shaded glory, GameCube owners can now look forward to a more mature hero in a form strikingly similar to his appearance in *Soul Calibur II*. However, Nintendo is quick to defend the notion that the change is a knee-jerk reaction to cynical opinion rather than a progression of the franchise.

"In every *Zelda* sequel we have adopted different types of graphics for each platform which best suited the particular kind of gameplay," insists Aonuma. "*Wind Waker*, for example, was a game in which Link's adventure went through the fairy-tale world, so we adopted a typically cartoon-like expression that we felt suited. However the newest sequel for the GameCube is the story of an adult Link and therefore we've adopted a more realistic expression for this story. The change of graphic images suitable to the contents of games is being discussed presently; it's problematic that some people have thought the new image change after *Wind Waker* too drastic."

And there's the rub – just as many criticised *Wind Waker* for its unique style, now others are wondering whether this new game is going too far in the opposite direction. If only everyone stopped worrying about the graphics and got back to admiring the quality of the franchise's gameplay it might make Aonuma's job a bit easier…

The Minish Cap is out on 15 November for Game Boy Advance and is reviewed on page 96. *The Legend Of Zelda* (working title) is out for GameCube in 2005.

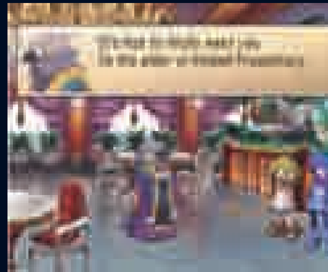


LIKE THE SOLE SURVIVING RELATIVE OF A BILLIONAIRE, EIJI AONUMA HAS INHERITED A TREASURE BEYOND ANYTHING HE COULD HAVE EVER DREAMED OF – THE KEYS TO THE LAND OF HYRULE. BUT BEING MASTER OF AN ENTIRE WORLD COMES AT A PRICE…

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE GO HALFWAY ROUND THE WORLD TO MEET NIPPON ICHI.





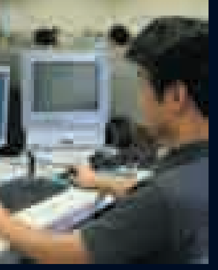


NIPPON ICHI

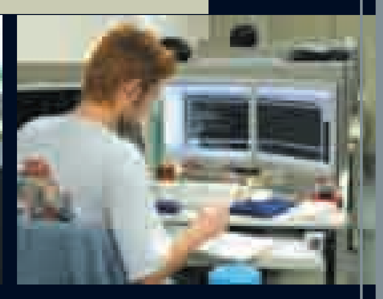
In an industry that's moving towards being dominated by a few gigantic companies, it's always a pleasure to see one of the best games on a console come from a relative unknown. Better still is to watch said underdog rise not only in terms of profile but also popularity, and today Nippon Ichi Software (NIS) has developed the kind of avid following usually associated with bands and film makers – unusual for a developer as opposed to a specific series. Perhaps oddest of all is that several years ago the name Nippon Ichi would have been almost entirely unknown to us poor European gamers whereas now it's synonymous with top-notch strategy RPGs laced with style and humour beyond almost all similar titles. Founded in 1994 in Gifu, Japan, where it built itself a reputation in both publishing and development, it was to be almost a decade before Nippon Ichi sent its comedy-tinged RPG offerings away from the firm's home country. But, oh, was it worth the wait…

CAST YOUR EYES EAST ON A CLOUDLESS EVENING AND YOU MIGHT JUST SPY SOMETHING ODD TWINKLING IN THE NIGHT SKY. THERE'S A NEW STAR IN RPG DEVELOPMENT. NIPPON ICHI IS INTENT ON PROVING NOT ONLY THAT 2D ISN'T DEAD BUT THAT WHEN IT COMES TO DEVELOPMENT TEAMS, SIZE DOESN'T MATTER.

Suddenly emerging onto the western publishing scene after a decade of work exclusively in Japan has opened many new doors for Nippon Ichi.









It doesn't take more than a quick glance at any of its titles to see that Nippon Ichi has developed a beautiful and unique style, but it's clear after talking with NIS America president Haru Akenaga that this never takes precedence over a game's content. "I believe games without the balance between style and content do not succeed," he says. "If the game lacks in style it makes a bad first impression, and if the game lacks in content the game will not hold its momentum." Yoshitsuna Kobayashi, chief director of NIS' entertainment department, is quick to second this. "Gamers today know what makes a good game and we work hard to satisfy these people," he explains. Even a tendency for many gamers to favour realism over style hasn't stunted the developer's incredible rise to popularity. "Thanks to the growing numbers of strategy RPG and anime fans around the world, we were able to build our reputation relatively smoothly," Akenaga says.

But it wasn't just the hardcore that bought into the Nippon Ichi dream – *Disgaea* in particular attracted thousands of gamers who might not have dreamed of owning a game full of so many numbers, and almost overnight, anyone could walk into their local games shop and buy titles that would previously have been wallet-denting imports. "We were surprised to see the non-hardcore gamers and anime fans

"I DO NOT SEE THE NEED TO MAKE EVERYTHING 3D – THERE ARE EXPRESSIONS THAT CANNOT BE CONVEYED WITH 3D GRAPHICS"

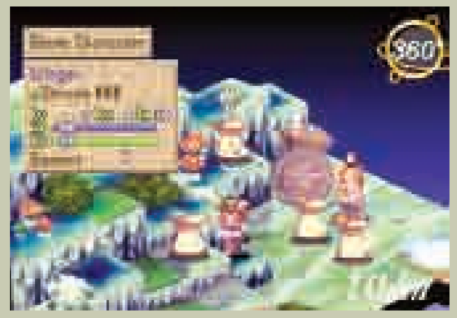
SHINICHI IKEDA, DIRECTOR OF DESIGN

ICHI. TASTY

It's a crying shame that most of Nippon Ichi's games have never left Japan, but we're grateful for what we do have – some of the finest RPGs ever created.

LA PUCELLE TACTICS (PS2, 2004)

It's easy to see where *Disgaea*'s wit and attitude come from after playing this forerunner (which will get a PAL release soon), and while it may not quite live up to *Hour Of Darkness*, its worth as a stepping stone to greatness is immeasurable.



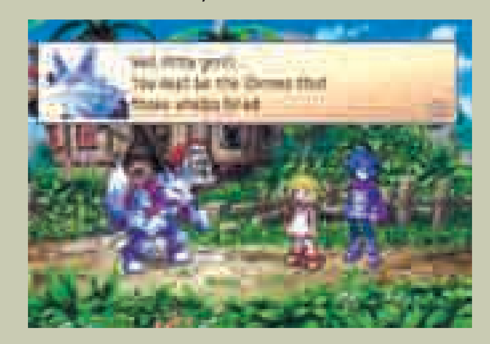
DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS (PS2, 2004)

Easily Nippon Ichi's most well-known title (outside Japan, at least). Cast aside everything you know to be true of meandering tactics games and embrace a new future – one where humour and entertainment are rife and character levels shoot up into five figures.

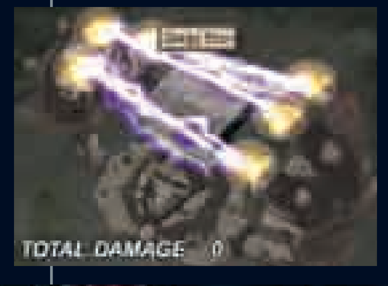


PHANTOM BRAVE (PS2, 2005)

Ditching the grid-based system in favour of a movement/battle flow more like *Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter*, Nippon Ichi's latest will be enjoying success in the US as you read this. The PAL version, on the other hand, won't be released until 2005.

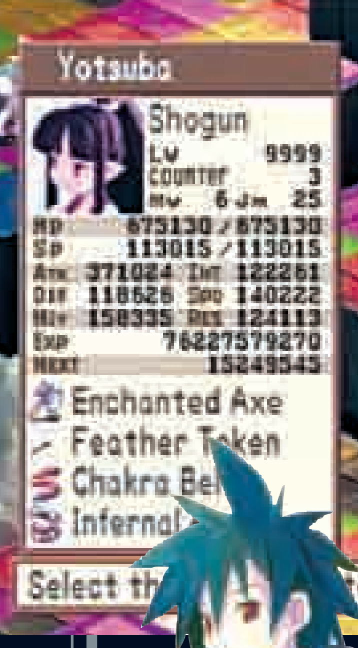


The company's first game in the west, *Disgaea*, has already attained something of a cult status with RPG fans for its huge amount of depth and complexity, despite the cute façade.











HITS OUT OF HELL

Ask the man on the street what Nippon Ichi is and you'll be met with the blankest of stares. But throw the same question at a clued-up gamer and you're more likely to be treated to a "Prinny Dood!" and the possibility of a high five. It may not have set the charts alight, but in the right circles *Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness* became a cult classic almost overnight. Favourable reviews across the board set the stage for one of the greatest strategy RPGs ever released onto our shores, but what was the secret of *Disgaea*'s underground success? "With *Disgaea*, the game appealed to many hardcore strategy RPG players, traditional RPG lovers and anime fans alike," says Haru Akenaga. Indeed, the consensus as to which game best encapsulates Nippon Ichi's attitude, approach and vision seems pretty unanimous. "That would have to be *Disgaea*," says Yoshitsuna Kobayashi. We can't say we're surprised – we're still levelling up Laharl and co, and as with most of its other games, Nippon Ichi's enthusiasm shows through. "We are enjoying our time developing every title," concludes Kobayashi.

embrace *Disgaea*," says Akenaga. "We had a good idea that the game would appeal to strategy RPG and traditional RPG fans but nothing this big." When even the developer of a game is taken aback by its reception, you know it has to be something special, and while we wish Nippon Ichi similar success with future releases (a publishing deal with Koei will see *La Pucelle* and *Phantom Brave* reach us in the next six months), no-one can be sure how well it will do. "It is always difficult to predict your true market," Akenaga explains. "You can have a general idea but you cannot know for sure until your game is released."

One of the things that sets Nippon Ichi apart from the competition is its willingness to throw a little humour into what is traditionally a very dry genre. "When we make games we think about what gamers will enjoy, and comedy turns out to be a very important factor in entertainment," says Souhei Niikawa, vice president of NIS' marketing and planning division. "People have fun when they watch comedy shows on TV, so it must be fun to play games with a little laughter in them. NIS will continue making games with a touch of humour." Good to hear – *Disgaea*'s off-the-wall wit and charm are unique in not only the strategy genre but gaming in general. But *Hour Of Darkness* wasn't always meant to be the cleverly amusing dungeon-crawler it turned out to be. "For *Disgaea*, the comedic scenes were not incorporated from the beginning, rather gradually added in during development," reveals Kobayashi. "All the humour was added with our hunch or gut feeling about it."

> "WE NEVER INTENDED TO MAKE GAMES FOR A SINGLE PLATFORM AND WE DO NOT INTEND TO DO SO IN THE FUTURE"
> SHINICHI IKEDA, DIRECTOR OF DESIGN

With humour and dialogue playing such essential roles in Nippon Ichi's games, it would be easy for a sloppy (or clinical) translation to reduce a game's impact with a foreign audience. Fortunately, as Akenaga explains, this isn't an issue with a reliable localisation team. "Most people seem to assume that the more important the text is, the more difficult it is to localise but this is simply not true. Terminology and jokes, for instance, seem to have little literary value but to a translator they are the most challenging to convert," he says, revealing his experience of localising Koei's Japanese titles for several years. "For instance, a joke in Japanese may not necessarily be funny in English. The localiser must be creative in order to make any sense out of that joke." Even aside from the humour, Nippon Ichi is all too aware of the importance of grabbing and holding local interest. "There are



minor changes to localisation for every region due to laws and regulations," says Akenaga, "But overall, the localisation is faithful to the original game."

In an effort to close the gap between east and west, last year saw the opening of NIS America. This means that Nippon Ichi can now publish its own titles in the US as well as gauge reactions to each game outside Japan. "We believed that publishing games ourselves in the United States was a natural next step after simply having our titles published by other companies," Akenaga says. "As part of our company's evolution, it was natural and necessary to open NIS America." As pleasing as it has been to see NIS spread its wings, a move into Europe – something only attempted relatively recently by Japanese giants like Square Enix and Koei – would mark the firm's global success and this is an area Akenaga is keen to investigate. "Some day, we would like to open an NIS Europe office," he confirms.

Despite branching out into other territories and expanding its catalogue, Nippon Ichi doesn't have

ASSEMBLING THE PERFECT PARTY

1 SHINICHI IKEDA, DIRECTOR OF DESIGN, ENTERTAINMENT DEPT
IN A NUTSHELL: An avid fan of 2D (who'd have thought it?), Ikeda is responsible for establishing and maintaining the visual style of each game, having done so for all three of the firm's PlayStation2 releases.

2 HARU AKENAGA, PRESIDENT, NIS AMERICA
IN A NUTSHELL: Previously VP of product management for Koei, working on such franchises as *Kessen* and *Dynasty Warriors* before NIS America opened. Localisation has now extended to *Disgaea* and *Phantom Brave*.

3 YOSHITSUNA KOBAYASHI, CHIEF DIRECTOR, ENTERTAINMENT DEPT
IN A NUTSHELL: Moving on from being game designer and main programmer on *Phantom Brave*, Kobayashi will be working on world setting and scenario writing on a new project as well as being head game designer.

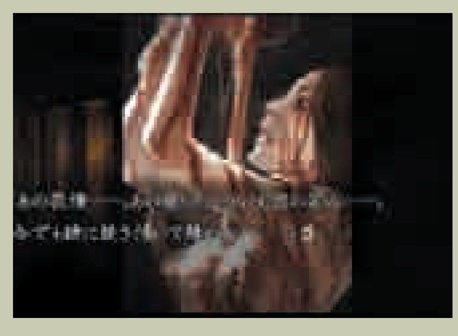
4 SOUHEI NIIKAWA, VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING & PLANNING DIVISION
IN A NUTSHELL: Nikawa heads up production management and is in charge of script writing for the majority of Nippon Ichi's output. Currently penning the script for a brand new strategy RPG.

NO PAL OF MINE

If you want to be a completist, these are the Japanese-only Nippon Ichi titles you need to pick up.

HAYARI GAMI (PS2, 2004)

In a departure from its usual strategy territory, Nippon Ichi's latest offering is a text-heavy horror adventure where you play an investigator trying to solve a series of grizzly murders. We'd be very surprised to see this released in the west.



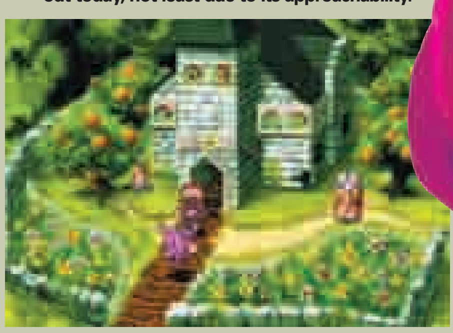
LANGRISSER V: THE END OF LEGEND (SATURN, 1998)

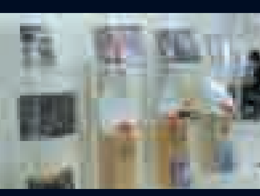
Published by Nippon Ichi, Careersoft's final RPG in the *Langrisser* series combined tactical thrills with the beautiful anime stylings of Satoshi Urushihara to break up the thinking. Just the right side of complex, you'll need a decent grasp of Japanese (or a translation) to attempt this one.



RHAPSODY: A MUSICAL ADVENTURE (PSONE, 2000)

Okay, so this one made it to the States… An almost childish appearance hid a deep and enjoyable adventure from all but the most fervid of RPG fans but *Rhapsody* is still worth checking out today, not least due to its approachability.



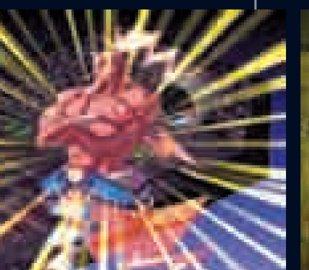


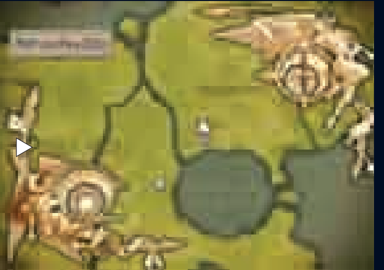
Nippon Ichi has plenty of awards – and you thought it was a new company.

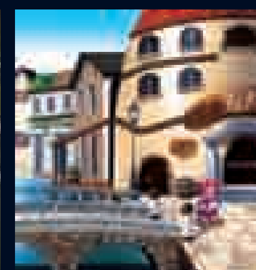


Despite the rather clinical look of the offices, the atmosphere at Nippon Ichi is vibrant and lively.









aspirations of being the next Square Enix – the company is keen to remain small and closely knit. "NIS will remain relatively small compared to Square Enix by establishing our brand name in the niche market," Akenaga says. "There are advantages to remaining small. Because NIS is not huge like Square Enix we have our limits on funding and workers but this also reflects many benefits. Most importantly, the return required on an investment is low so we can be more daring." Nippon Ichi is one of the few remaining developers that can boast such freedom and still maintain a following, as Akenaga points out. "You're not dealing with a large organisation that watches the profit margins," he says, adamant that the company will not 'sell out'. "Of course, we all have to be realistic where survival is concerned but profit is not always the priority – creativity is."

It'll come as no surprise, then, that the subject of creativity is the first to get the whole team to really sit up, eager to explain where they get their inspiration. "When we are planning to make a game, we usually do not say, 'Let's make this game like this movie'. Instead, we begin our development by basing our plans off Kobayashi's ideas," explains Niikawa. "During our development phase, however,

Now that Nippon Ichi has signed a western distribution deal with Koei, we can expect to see many of its future titles arriving on European shores for us to enjoy.

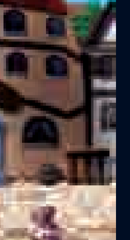


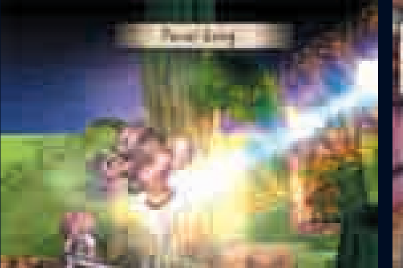
KIDS IN AMERICA

With business booming in Japan and interest growing in the west, it looked for much of last year like Nippon Ichi was ready to spread its wings and cross the water instead of dealing with local publishers such as Atlus. So in December 2003, NIS America opened up, cutting out the middle man and taking its titles straight to the US public. "The timing was just right," explains Haru Akenaga. "The number of American anime fans was growing at an enormous rate and we wanted to target that specific market." With titles like *Disgaea* treated to a rapturous reception for not just the wealth of content but the beautiful anime stylings, it's no surprise that Nippon Ichi would want to attract both RPG fans and animation lovers from all corners of the globe. But what of the booming European games market? Are we likely to see Japan's current RPG darlings put down roots near the UK? "Unfortunately, we have no plans to open an office in Europe at this time," Akenaga says, admitting that it is something he would like to see happen, just not in the near future. "We will definitely keep our relationship with Koei for our forthcoming titles."

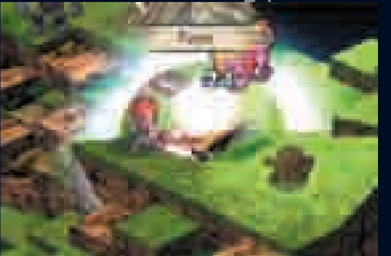
"WHEN WE MAKE GAMES WE THINK ABOUT WHAT GAMERS WILL ENJOY, AND COMEDY TURNS OUT TO BE A VERY IMPORTANT FACTOR"

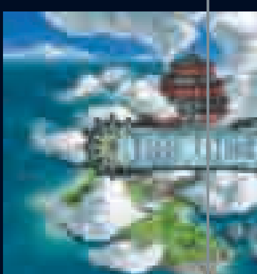
SOUHEI NIIKAWA, VP, MARKETING & PLANNING DIVISION









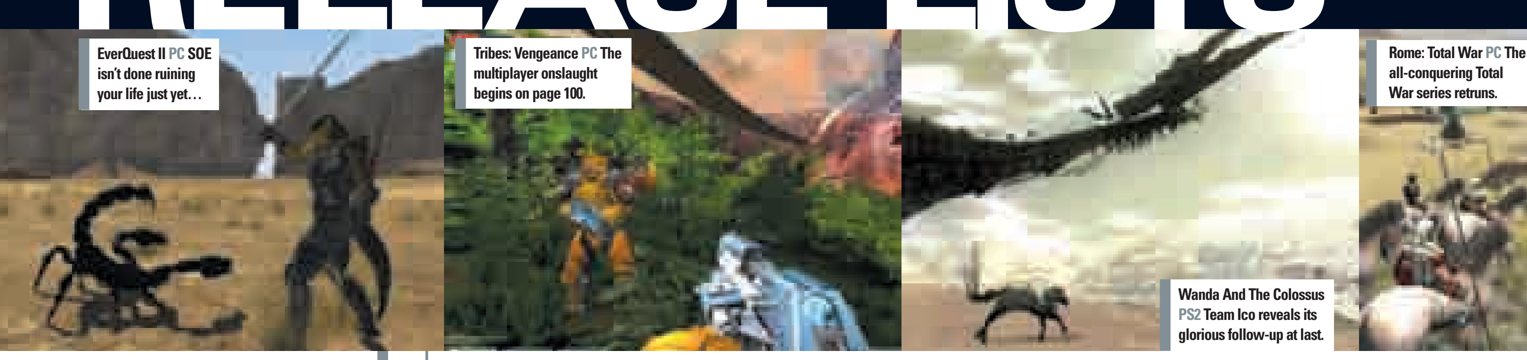


we might receive some influences. For instance, *Disgaea* was influenced by *The Nightmare Before Christmas* – you might find the two worlds to have a similar mood and feeling." And for such an artistic and creative company, surely NIS would love to see a broader acceptance of the art of gaming? Director of design Shinichi Ikeda seems to think it not only should but will. "There is an art style called Ukiyo-e in Japan. A long time ago, Ukiyo-e was perceived as a form of entertainment but today it is seen as art. Therefore, one cannot deny that like Ukiyo-e, videogames will someday be called art. I personally hope that day will come soon."

As console power increases, so does the potential to develop games that are closer to what could broadly be accepted as art, so Nippon Ichi is happy that we're at the dawn of a new generation of hardware. "Utilising the strengths of home systems and portable systems allows greater freedom for developers," says Ikeda. "Also, the way we play games and the way we express ourselves through gameplay will evolve as systems improve. From a developer's standpoint, it is a big step forward." NIS is one of the many developers that has announced its support for Sony's PSP. Information concerning the first portable title, *Makai Wars*, is still being kept very quiet but it looks as though this won't be the only foray into shrunken gaming we'll see from Nippon Ichi. "We are putting a lot of effort into R&D on cellular phone games. However, this is limited to Japan only," says Niikawa, explaining the problems such a market poses. "The games developed for Japanese mobile phones are quite large in memory size, so it is difficult to incorporate them into American and European cell phones. However, we would like to develop phone games for the world market and we will do so at the right time."

With the strategy RPG genre all but sewn up and new fans being attracted to NIS at an incredible rate, where next for the rising star of the east? "We don't plan to limit ourselves to a single genre. However, we won't immediately jump to other genres but gradually extend our arms out," Akenaga says. "Losing fan interest is a fear that every developer faces and NIS is no exception. That is why we all struggle to create the most innovative and creative games to keep satisfying our fans." But whether its developing an epic feat of strategy or a text-led bloodbath, one thing's for sure – Nippon Ichi won't be pandering to the masses by throwing polygons around. "Many people ask why we use 2D," says Ikeda "I do not see the need to make everything 3D since there are expressions that cannot be conveyed with 3D graphics. There are many forms of artistic expressions and I believe 2D can exist as one too." Amen to that.

RELEASE LISTS


EverQuest II PC SOE isn't done ruining your life just yet…

Tribes: Vengeance PC The multiplayer onslaught begins on page 100.

Wanda And The Colossus PS2 Team Ico reveals its glorious follow-up at last.

Rome: Total War PC The all-conquering Total War series retruns.



games™ MOST PLAYED

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Format: PC
Publisher: Activision

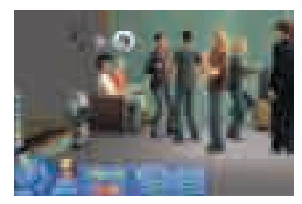
Highest body count in any game ever? More than likely. When a post-battle obituary reads like a phone book, you have to wonder how anyone can still look at something like *Dynasty Warriors* and have the word 'epic' leap into their brains. Flanking slaughter never tasted as good as it does in *Total War*.



THE SIMS 2

Format: PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts

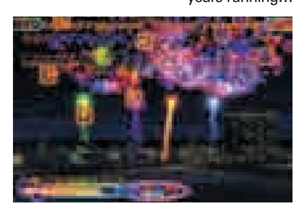
With the **games™** family experiencing love, loss, ageing and gold-digging in the space of a few days, we thought we'd seen it all after our second marriage. Oh, how wrong we were – abductions, deaths, hauntings and moving into the world's most awesome manor have helped ensure we won't be tiring of life soon…



FANTAVISION

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony

So Guy Fawkes' Night approaches for another annual feast of pyromaniac delight and, once again, there's a fleeting return to Sony's criminally underrated firework puzzler opens the floodgates for a month of bleary eyed late nights. We really should have learned our lesson after doing the same thing several years running…





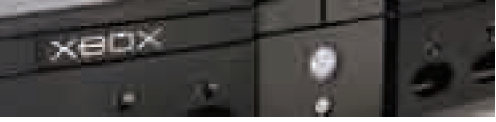
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '04			
12 November	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
12 November	Pool Shark 2	Zoo Digital	
12 November	Shadow Hearts: Covenant	Midway	
12 November	The Incredibles	THQ	
12 November	The Urbz: Sims In The City	Electronic Arts	
19 November	Mega Man X Command Mission	Capcom	
19 November	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
19 November	Killzone	Sony	
19 November	Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	
19 November	Need For Speed Underground 2	Electronic Arts	
19 November	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Wanted
19 November	Ratchet And Clank 3	Sony	
19 November	The Getaway: Black Monday	Sony	
19 November	WWE Smackdown! Vs Raw	THQ	
19 November	WRC4: World Rally Championship	Sony	
26 November	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	
26 November	Miami Vice	Koch	
26 November	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Vivendi	
26 November	The Polar Express	THQ	
TBC	Jak 3	Sony	
TBC	La Pucelle Tactics	Koei	Wanted
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	Gran Turismo 4	Sony	
03 December	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Shadow Of Rome	Capcom	
TBC	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Ace Combat 5	Sony	
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Blood Will Tell	SEGA	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 4	Sony	
TBC	Guilty Gear Isuka	Sega	
TBC	Mercenaries	Activision	
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Moto GP 4	Sony	
TBC	The Punisher	THQ	
TBC	SOCOM 3	Sony	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts 2	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Okami	Capcom	
TBC	Haunting Ground	Capcom	
TBC	Killer 7	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Phantom Brave	Koei	Wanted
TBC	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Resident Evil: Outbreak – File 2	Capcom	
TBC	The Nightmare Before Christmas	Capcom	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Far Cry: Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	NARC	Midway	
TBC	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Neo Contra	Konami	
TBC	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '04			
12 November	Paper Mario 2: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Wanted
12 November	The Incredibles	THQ	
12 November	The Urbz: Sims In The City	Electronic Arts	
19 November	Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	Wanted
19 November	Mega Man X Command Mission	Capcom	
19 November	Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	
19 November	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
19 November	Need For Speed Underground 2	Electronic Arts	
19 November	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Wanted
26 November	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	Wanted
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	Mario Party 6	Nintendo	
03 December	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventure	Nintendo	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	
TBC	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Star Fox	Nintendo	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Killer 7	Capcom	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '04			
11 November	Halo 2	Microsoft	Wanted

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Phantom Brave PS2 Another Nippon Ichi classic in the making.

Zelda: The Minish Cap GBA We cut Link down to size on page 96.

Jade Empire Multi Bioware tries its hand at a little eastern magic.

12 November	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
12 November	Pool Shark 2	Zoo Digital	
12 November	The Incredibles	THQ	
12 November	The Urbz: Sims In The City	Electronic Arts	
19 November	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	
19 November	Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	
19 November	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Wanted
26 November	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Vivendi	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	Wanted
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Blinx 2: Masters Of Time And Space	Microsoft	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Doom 3	Activision	
TBC	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
TBC	Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	
TBC	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Dead Or Alive Ultimate	Microsoft	
TBC	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
TBC	Oddworld Stranger	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	NARC	Midway	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	Activision	Wanted
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	
TBC	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	Midway	Wanted
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '04			
12 November	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
12 November	Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	
12 November	The Incredibles	THQ	
19 November	EverQuest II	Ubisoft	
19 November	The Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle Earth	Electronic Arts	
19 November	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	
19 November	Need For Speed Underground 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted
26 November	Children Of The Nile	Sega	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
DECEMBER '04			
TBC	Football Manager 2005	Sega	
TBC	Men Of Valor	Vivendi	
TBC	Advent Rising	Majesco	
TBC	Tribes: Vengeance	Vivendi	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Duke Nukem Forever	Vivendi	
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
TBC	The Matrix Online	Warner Bros	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	Activision	Wanted
TBC	UFO: Aftershock	Cenega	
TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '04			
12 November	Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Wanted
12 November	The Urbz: Sims In The City	Electronic Arts	
12 November	The Incredibles	THQ	
19 November	Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	
19 November	Wings Advance	Metro 3D	
19 November	Defender Of The Crown	Zoo Digital	
26 November	Super Mario Ball	Nintendo	
DECEMBER '04			
03 December	Mario Party Advance	Nintendo	
10 December	Final Fantasy I & 2	Nintendo	
TBC	Banjo Pilot	THQ	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories	Buena Vista	Wanted
TBC	Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	Konami	
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Donkey Kong: King Of Swing	Nintendo	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2

Format: PC
Publisher: Codemasters
For anyone even slightly into realistic war games, there can be no more anticipated title than the Codies' sequel to one of the finest wartime FPS games ever put together. Based on real military technology, we simply can't wait for *Flashpoint 2* to get a confirmed date.



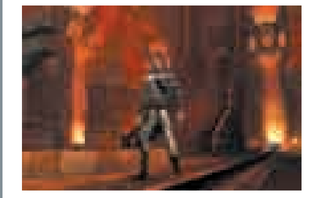
ASTRO BOY

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Despite the recent US roll-out of one of Japan's favourite cult characters, it remains to be seen whether a similar introduction will be made in Europe. We've been rocking the GBA version for some time now and it'd be quite nice if we had the PS2 version to complement it as well.



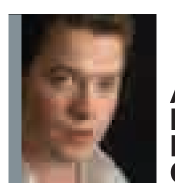
GOD OF WAR

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony
Despite being announced at this year's E3, it looks as though it'll be Christmas next year before we get our hands on the Greek adventure that the passable *Rygar* could have been. Whirling chains, mythical creatures and some ingenious gameplay elements await in 2005, and hopes are high that this action adventure title will stand out.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…



A PR LOT IS NOT A HAPPY ONE…

Working in games PR is great. You get to play games all day, go to parties and have glamorous PR lunches. Or so my friends tell me.

I spend most of my time complaining to anyone who'll listen that I'm always busy, and thus find myself doing exactly the opposite. Whether it's worrying about review scores or fretting over emails, sometimes it feels like being a kid with a sweet tooth given free rein in Woolworth's pick 'n' mix, only to be told by the dentist that if you do indulge, your teeth will fall out and never grow back.

Surely, working with a brand so synonymous with great games that I've grown up with and strolling into work under the big blue Sega logo (which I'm told can be seen from space, not just the M4) is every kid's dream?

"But you don't understand; I'm really busy," I tell them. But then it's not just me – the Christmas period is always a busy time for any publisher.

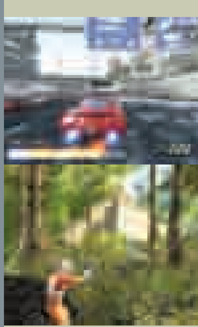
I played our new Nintendo DS game yesterday. Six months before launch. I sat and played it for over an hour. Every time I lost a life, I looked up nervously to check if any of my colleagues were whispering that I was 'playing games at work' and should be 'quietly removed'. Instead they were more open about their thoughts, "Stop hogging it. I want a go…"

But hang on. I just played a Sega game before launch, on a hardware platform that most of my mates won't see for six months, let alone play. No one's complaining because it's my job to do it. My job also involves working with some of the best developers in the world, as well as an in-house development team that does make 'em like they used to. And to think I used to want to be an astronaut.

STEFAN MCGARRY
PR MANAGER, SEGA EUROPE

FROM THE FRONT

XBOX LIVE TITLES OVERSHADOW PLAYSTATION2 SALES, WHILE NINTENDO REAPS THE REWARD OF CHEAP GBAS



Burnout 3 and *Battlefront* have been huge successes.

XBOX IS A LIVE WIRE

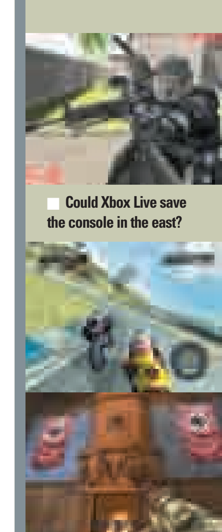
XBOX LIVE GAMES SHIFT UNPRECEDENTED UNITS AS UK MARKET OVER-PERFORMS

Microsoft's Xbox Live service is believed to have been responsible for a sudden leap in Xbox software sales. During *Burnout 3*'s first week on sale, 57 per cent of the copies sold were for the PlayStation2, with 43 being sold for the Xbox. Considering that there are six times as many PS2s as Xboxes in UK homes, this is a surprising sales ratio. (The PS2 installed base is currently standing somewhere near 6 million with Microsoft having shifted just over a million Xboxes.)

A similar first-week split has been announced for *Star Wars Battlefront* which, like *Burnout 3*, is Xbox Live compatible, causing some to suggest that it's the popularity of Microsoft's online service that's causing the high sales.

Talking to games industry trade magazine *MCV*, Activision's Roger Walkden said that the explosion of Xbox Live could change the market: "No-one predicted how strongly Xbox Live-enabled versions of games would start coming out of the blocks. Clearly success parameters are changing."

Aside from the hunger Xbox Live subscribers clearly have for new games supporting the service, Microsoft has also seen promising sales elsewhere, with *Fable* jumping in at the top of Xbox charts, making its way to number two in the all-format charts and becoming the fastest selling Xbox game in Europe, beaten to the top spot only by *FIFA 2005*, which, like *Burnout 3* and *Star Wars Battlefront*, is a cross-format release and Xbox Live compatible.



Could Xbox Live save the console in the east?

XBOX LIVE SUCCESS IN ASIA AS 15 PER CENT OF OWNERS SUBSCRIBE

ASIA LOVES XBOX LIVE



Just six months since its launch in Asian territories, Xbox Live is now being used by 15 per cent of Xbox owners in the region, making the service a huge success.

Xbox Live is available in seven Asia-Pacific regions spanning Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

The worldwide uptake for Xbox Live is currently 12 per cent of Xbox owners, so things are looking bright in the Asian region. So bright that Xbox regional sales director for the Asia-Pacific region, Yolanda Chan, stated that Microsoft has high hopes for reaching 22 per cent uptake by the end of the fiscal year.

Compared to other world regions, the Asian market is fairly small, but this high sign-up rate has ensured that around 200,000 of the 1 million worldwide Xbox Live users are from the Asia-Pacific region. The fast uptake in Xbox Live subscriptions in Asian regions can partly be attributed to the fact that in countries such as Hong Kong and South Korea, broadband is widely available and at much faster speeds than the UK can boast. Also, online gaming is extremely popular in these areas, making Xbox Live something that can be easily embraced.



Beyond Xbox Live, the games market as a whole is over-performing. This has caused headaches for retail buyers who left their stores short of some big-hitting games such as *Doom 3* and *Star Wars Battlefront* simply because the demand has been impossible to forecast. "Christmas started for the industry in September this year," explains Walkden. "The market is booming in a way only a few predicted. Both these factors are making forecasting difficult for retailers."

And it's not over for retail buyers yet, with potential stock headaches predicted for games such as *Halo 2* and *GTA: San Andreas*. "It will be very difficult for every publisher and every retailer to forecast these correctly and you can see both parties getting it wrong from time to time," says Walkden.

UK SALES

0
1000000
2000000
3000000
4000000
5000000
6000000

Sales since launch
- Xbox – 1 million
- PlayStation2 – 5.5 million

WORLD WIDE SALES

0
10000000
20000000
30000000
40000000
50000000
60000000
70000000
80000000

Sales since launch
- Xbox – 15.5 million
- PlayStation2 – 70 million

SUPER PROFIT SMASH

NINTENDO CASHES IN ON GBA SUCCESS

Nintendo has announced that for the six months ending September 2004 it has made almost double its predicted profits thanks to favourable exchange rates and high overseas sales of the GBA SP.

The group net profit for the Japanese company is now forecast at ¥46 billion, a substantial rise from an earlier estimation of ¥35 billion. Recurring profit forecast has also risen, now standing at ¥78 billion from a previous figure of ¥40 billion.

Nintendo is expected to attribute ¥36 billion of these profits to the vagaries of the exchange rate. Previous forecasts expected the dollar to equal ¥105 during this six-month period, yet it now stands at ¥111.05. Also, the euro was expected to equal ¥127, but now is now worth ¥137. Which all basically means that the value of Nintendo's income from abroad has been boosted by a weak Japanese economy.

Despite larger than expected profits, Nintendo has downgraded sales forecasts from ¥200 billion to ¥185 billion to compensate for the price reduction of the GBA SP.

In the UK the GBA SP dropped from £89.99 to £69.99, a move that saw the sales of the handheld jump 150 per cent.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	FIFA 2005	EA Sports	Multi
2	Fable	Microsoft	Xbox
3	Pokémon Fire Red	Nintendo	GBA
4	The Sims 2	EA Games	PC
5	Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Multi
6	Rome: Total War	Activision	PC
7	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Multi
8	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	Multi
9	Pokémon Leaf Green	Nintendo	GBA
10	Def Jam: Fight For New York	EA Games	Multi

No prizes for guessing that the latest *FIFA* title would go straight to the top of the chart, but it's perhaps more surprising to see *Fable* enter the top ten at number two. A good showing for the latest *Pokémon* titles too.

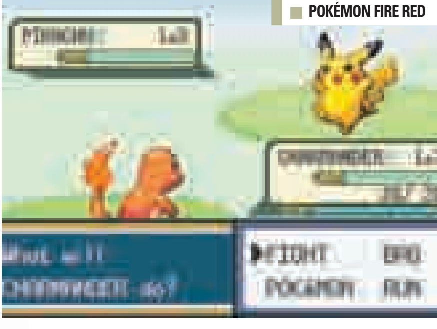
All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 9 October 2004)

FIFA 2005



FABLE

POKÉMON FIRE RED




BOSS....



“Look at the size of that thing” **Super Empire Strikes Back SNES [LucasArts] 1993**

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: BioWare
RELEASE: Q1 '05
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1

HISTORY

While *Jade Empire* is the first game of its kind from BioWare, the developer has already confirmed that it will form the basis of a whole new franchise, with many games to come in the future.

CONCEPT

BioWare goes all *Crouching Tiger* for its latest RPG project, which sees us introduced to a world of honourable combat and mystical magic, all steeped in far eastern goodness.

CUNNINGLY FASHIONED FROM PURE GREEN

JADE EMPIRE

Building a reputation for a particular style of game is a double-edged sword, even for a successful developer. On one hand, your future titles earn kudos before the ink's even dry on their first press release. But say you want to try something new, something that goes against almost everything you've done in the past. Is it worth the risk? The rewards for getting it right are plentiful, but we can think of many developers who lost out after taking a new direction.

With *Jade Empire*, BioWare admits that it's taking a risk, though it's not wading completely out of its depth. It's the change in subject matter that's most noticeable – the clinically futuristic setting of *Knights Of The Old Republic* and the gritty hack-and-slash world of *Baldur's Gate* have been replaced by the tranquility of far eastern philosophy, with the soft-focus effects enhancing the finely detailed natural beauty of each environment. It might look a far cry from anything the developer has done before, but then that's the point.

"We like to keep surprising people, and we think the choices we've made in *Jade Empire* regarding the combat system and the setting have certainly surprised many," says Greg Zeschuk, one of BioWare's joint CEOs. "One of our goals is to maintain the variety of products we build internally so that the people working on the games can gravitate to whichever game or setting they enjoy the most. This is a game that Ray [Muzyka, Bioware's other CEO] and I have wanted to build for nearly ten years, so I think that qualifies as something that is of interest to us."

While the change in scenery might seem like a big leap on its own, the biggest shift in focus comes not in the game's genre (being, as it is, an absorbing RPG with plenty of character and flair) but in its execution. *Jade Empire*'s action is completely set in real-time as opposed to the D20-based stylings of the developer's previous efforts, something that may surprise many of BioWare's followers – and yes, we're talking 'real' real-time as opposed to the faux covering offered by the combat in *Knights Of The Old Republic*.

Naturally, such an adjustment has required a huge amount of work, simply because it's something that the company hasn't tried for a very long time; its last foray with real-time action, *MDK 2*, came out almost five years ago, since when all of BioWare's titles have revolved around traditional D&D-ruled combat. According to the developer, though, moving into real-time was as much out of necessity as it was a conscious decision made from the very beginning.

"*Jade Empire* had to have real-time combat because the subject matter demanded it," admits Jim Bishop, *Jade Empire*'s producer. "I remember early on we were talking about the various possibilities for combat and Greg made an excellent point: 'You can't make a game about kung fu and not have kung fu fighting.' It seems obvious in retrospect, but at the time it was a scary decision – we'd never done a real-time combat role-playing game, and knew that it meant an additional source of risk."

That risk was the question of how to implement such a combat method without upsetting the careful balance – too simple and the game squanders all the skill required in a subtly crafted RPG, too complex and it loses all its playability. It's a fine line, but *Jade Empire* seems to walk it with ease. Taken at face value, the controls appear simple enough to enable anyone to access them: basic short- and mid-range attacks use single button presses, while more powerful strikes involving throws or area clearance require buttons to be pressed simultaneously. However, it's from here that combination moves can be built up, which introduces a far greater element of skill to the combat. Gifted players will find themselves performing long strings of devastating moves, culminating in *Jade Empire*'s coup de grace – a system BioWare has dubbed Harmonic Combos.

Accessible only to players who've evolved their characters enough to master multiple arts of fighting, Harmonic Combos combine moves from styles to create powerful (and often messy) attacks that can destroy an opponent in a single blow. Naturally, they're far more difficult to

FOLLOW THE LEADER

One of the ways that *Jade Empire* allows players to customise their gameplay experience is through the party system. The game doesn't force you to create a party as some other traditional RPGs do, but the ability to convince people to join your cause (be it by charm, payment or even simple threats) means you can swiftly create a formidable entourage to travel with you. Such followers will then assist you in battle and give advice when necessary, although how much you'll get is down to who you choose to join you. "While you don't have direct control over these followers in battles, you can influence their actions through dialogue," says Ray Muzyka. "Some followers are romantic interests, while others will help you craft new items or open up new sub-quests or areas for you to explore. Depending on which ones you gather during the course of the game, the game will play differently."


JADE EMPIRE
XBOX
"COMBINING PROVEN BIOWARE RPG STYLINGS WITH AN INTUITIVE AND INCREDIBLY DEEP FIGHTING SYSTEM, JADE EMPIRE PRESSES ALL THE RIGHT BUTTONS"



perform than regular attacks – even once you know the exact combination of styles and moves necessary to create one – but the results are worth it.

"We decided very early in development that we wanted a lot of tactical depth," says Bishop, "but we wanted it to emerge from the mechanics of switching styles, not from traditional fight game tactics like using reversals, locks or interrupts. We still maintain a solid attack/reaction underpinning similar to action and fighting games, but the tactical heart of the system (and where the complexity lies) is in switching between styles. This helps to ensure that players can be good at combat by thinking, not just by mashing buttons."

Thought isn't the first thing that springs to mind when discussing free-roaming action beat-'em-ups, but then that's not the only genre concept *Jade Empire* takes under its wing. Indeed, while the real-time aspect may be new to BioWare's more recent titles, comfort can be taken from the knowledge that the developer's extensive experience with RPGs still shines through in *Jade Empire*'s gameplay. Those with concerns should put them to one side; this is, after all, an RPG first and a brawler second, something that becomes clear once you see the framework that fits around *Jade Empire*'s combat.

Essentially, *Jade Empire*'s premise is relatively simple – as a pupil of all things martial arts, it's your task to train under the watchful eye of your sensei and travel the land so that you too may one day be called Master. However, the lack of complexity in the game's premise allows BioWare to place all of the depth firmly in the world of *Jade Empire* itself; a land teeming with huge environments, people to

"THE JADE EMPIRE TEAM IS PHENOMENALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT THE GAME AND IT SHOWS IN WHAT THEY'RE BUILDING"
GREG ZESCHUK, JOINT CEO, BIOWARE

I HAVE THE POWER

With eastern philosophy playing a major part in the *Jade Empire* concept, it's not surprising that one of the most important elements of the game's combat system is Chi – the mystical life force that's said to exist in all of us. In *Jade Empire*, Chi acts as a measure of your character's internal power and grants you numerous abilities such as using it to restore health to yourself or your followers or power-specific fighting styles (specifically those focused on magic or demonic transformation). However, the primary use of Chi is to enter an advanced state of combat that effectively turns up the intensity of all your fighting styles; paralysis attacks, for example, may affect a wider area or even permanently turn an enemy to stone, while magic attacks earn additional effects and so on. Using Chi in this way is costly but it can turn the tide of a fight incredibly quickly if used in the right way.

■ Demonic transformations cost huge amounts of Chi, but can dish out plenty of damage to a foe.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

'Entertain the world' – a bold mission statement, but one that BioWare has managed to achieve. Founded in 1995, the Edmonton-based developer remains independent despite having a string of quality games to its name. Employing over 180 people, it has a number of new titles under development.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS: KOTOR** 2003 [Multi]
- **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** 2002 [PC]
- **BALDUR'S GATE** 1998 [PC]



The fighting styles you choose can drastically change the way you play.

No martial arts game would be complete without some swordplay.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"WITHOUT GREEN DESTINY, YOU ARE NOTHING!"

WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE - ROLLING x 'WATAAAAAH!' = JADE EMPIRE

"OUR GOAL IS TO MAKE JADE EMPIRE THE BEST GAME WE'VE YET DEVELOPED AT BIOWARE"

RAY MUZYKA, JOINT CEO, BIOWARE



WARRIORS OF VIRTUE

Which character you choose to play as in *Jade Empire* has a great effect on the kind of adventure that you'll get to experience…

TIGER SHEN

The bull to Furious Ming's cheetah, Tiger Shen has the strength to wield heavy weapons and the skill to put them to deadly use.

WU THE LOTUS BLOSSOM

A practical choice for the uninitiated, Wu the Lotus Blossom offers the perfect balance between power and grace, strength and agility.

FURIOUS MING

The quintessential light and fast martial artist, favouring speed over strength. Ming's abilities are enhanced greatly by using Focus mode.

DEATH'S HAND

As the head of the Lotus Assassins (and *Jade Empire*'s main villain), Death's Hand is the new face of the law and a deadly opponent to boot.

TOAD DEMON

One of the strongest castes of celestial underling, Toad Demons are a force to be reckoned with. Their tongues can kill a man with one blow.

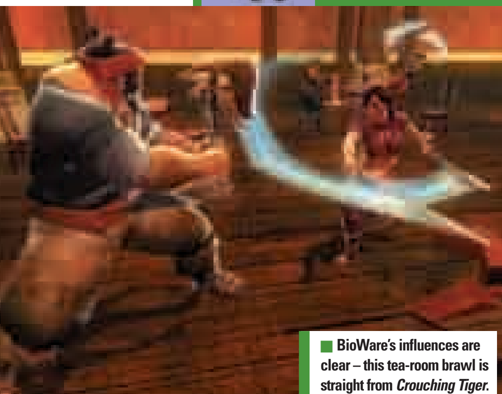


KUNG FU PROFILE

■ Martial arts have always been a popular gaming genre, but it's amazing how the complexity of its representation has evolved. From two-move combat to motion-captured animation showing the exact art of each fighting style, the genre has come a long way.

HISTORY

■ **VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION** 2003 [Arcade]
■ **ART OF FIGHTING** 1992 [Neo Geo]
■ **KUNG FU MASTER** 1984 [Arcade]



■ BioWare's influences are clear – this tea-room brawl is straight from *Crouching Tiger.*



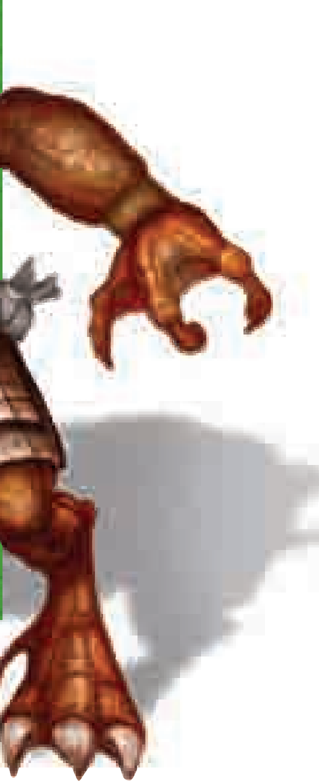


interact with and dark secrets to uncover. The game's non-linear design, along with its emphasis on non-player character interaction and the evolution of your character depending on how you behave, places the exploration firmly on a par with that of *KOTOR*. However, it's *Jade Empire*'s heavy emphasis on character development that makes it stand out above most other RPGs. In those, improving your character is important to achieving your ultimate goal; in *Jade Empire*, it *is* your goal.

You'll begin with two fighting styles of your choice, before learning new styles, moves and combos within the first hour of play. Covering a wide range of broad style brackets (from martial arts and weaponry to magical attacks and the ability to morph into a mythical creature) which are, in turn, broken down into individual style trees within each category, new styles can be learnt from many different sources. The limit isn't on the number of skills you can learn – there are over 30 to be found in total – but on the amount that you can have 'equipped' ready to use at any one time. Ultimately, it's the process of choosing which styles to learn, which to advance and which to use in combat that lies at the heart of *Jade Empire*'s gameplay.

"WE TRY VERY HARD TO BALANCE EXPLORATION, ROLE PLAYING AND COMBAT IN ALL OF OUR GAMES AND JADE EMPIRE IS NO EXCEPTION"

JIM BISHOP, PRODUCER, BIOWARE



CODE OF CONDUCT

Just as Bioware's *Knights Of The Old Republic* gave players the chance to lean towards either the Light or Dark side of the Force, so *Jade Empire* offers a similar option to change the player's allegiance. Your character's behaviour and the way they interact with both the inhabitants and the world of *Jade Empire* naturally swings the balance, and can have numerous effects from altering the way characters behave towards you to ultimately changing the course of the adventure. However, BioWare has worked hard to ensure that maintaining either moral stance isn't as easy as it sounds. "The choices in *Jade Empire* don't feel as clear cut as in other games," says Greg Zeschuk. "They deal with a fair amount of ambiguity, at least in terms of the initial choices. Many games tend to give a binary choice – pick either good or evil – and it is quite obvious which one you're picking, but in *Jade* the good and evil choices are more insidious. This makes for a much more compelling experience."

And it's the advancement of skills that opens *Jade Empire* up even more. While levelling up by gaining combat experience is important, doing so also earns you Style Points that are crucial to the enhancement of your character's skills, as they can be spent furthering your abilities by unlocking new parts of your style trees. This then opens up new moves and abilities, which gives you access to more Harmonic Combos, allowing you to kill greater enemies and earn more Style Points, which then… well, you get the idea.

"In many ways, evolving your fighting styles in *Jade Empire* is just as important as levelling up your character," says Bishop. "We've taken a lot of the functionality that resides in character classes in traditional RPGs – resistances, damage bonuses, special abilities and so on – and put it into the styles, which puts a lot of power in your hands as the player. You can choose to make your styles faster or more powerful, add new effects like Poison or Confusion, make them more effective against certain types of opponents, improve their key moves and so on."

And that's just the beginning. BioWare has made it clear that it is determined to make *Jade Empire* the best game that the company has developed, and what we've seen goes a long way to convincing us it has succeeded. The prospect of around 30 hours of gameplay, the complex storyline, the chance to decide between being good or evil and then experience multiple endings based on those choices… even without the extensive combat system, it sounds like a successful BioWare title.

By taking the action in a new, real-time direction, though, the developer has created something special; a risk well taken, with a reward well deserved. "We're very excited about the depth of *Jade Empire*," says Muzyka. "Not only will it provide replayability, but it will enhance the variety of experiences players can have even if they only want to play the game through once. They will be able to play the game how they want to play. Do they want to become a martial arts master, a weapons master or a master magician? Do they want to be evil, good or neither? All of these options, and many more, are available."

WANDA TO KYOZOU



■ The beasts showcased so far are as ugly as they are enormous.

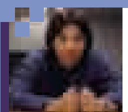
"THERE WAS SOME OPPOSITION TO A SEQUEL, ALONG THE LINES OF ICO BEING MORE THAN COMPLETE IN BOTH IN TERMS OF GAMEPLAY AND STORY"

KENJI KAIDO, PRODUCER, WANDA TO KYOZOU

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HOW THE MIGHTY WILL FALL

ICO + HORSE x MONSTERS! = WANDA TO KYOZOU

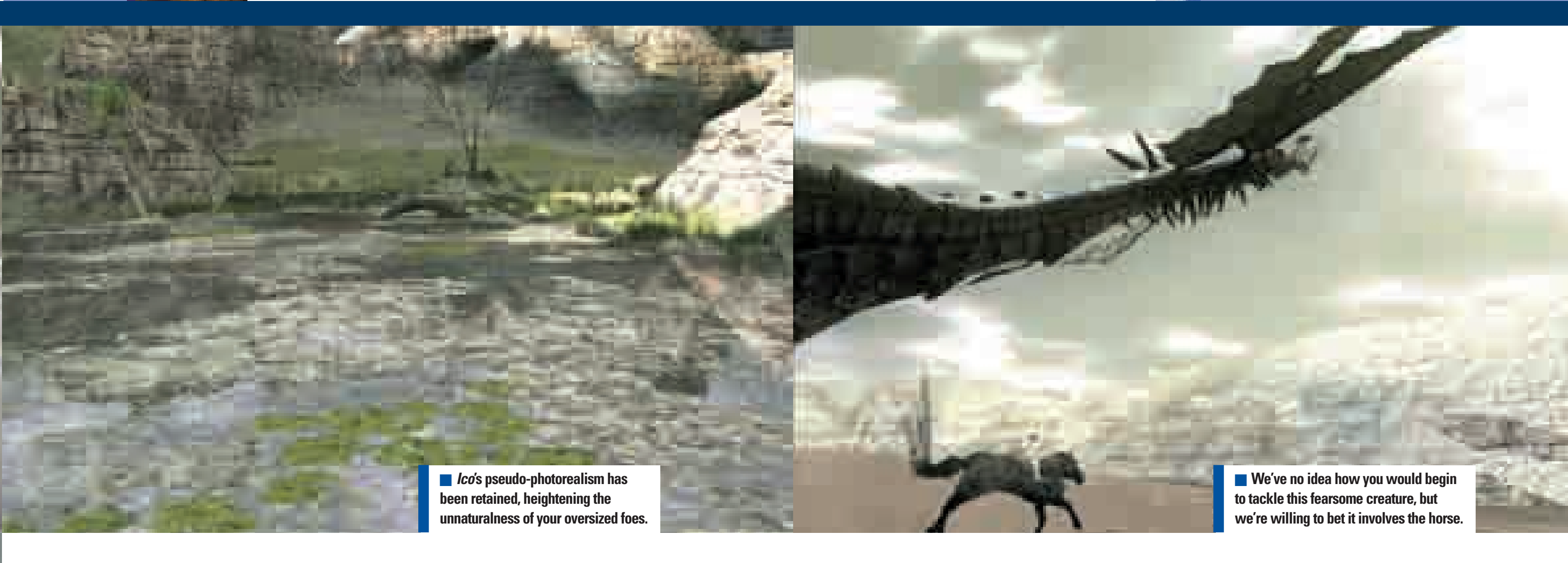


DESIGNER PROFILE

Beginning as a PSone title before being upgraded to Sony's newer hardware, the magnificent *Ico* was four long years in the making for art designer Fumito Ueda. He has spent much of the time since *Ico*'s completion planning the concept designs for, and then developing, its follow-up, *Wanda to Kyozou*.

HISTORY

ICO 2001 [PS2]



Ico's pseudo-photorealism has been retained, heightening the unnaturalness of your oversized foes.

We've no idea how you would begin to tackle this fearsome creature, but we're willing to bet it involves the horse.

THE ICO TEAM RETURNS FOR A SUPER-SIZED SECOND COURSE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEJ
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: 2005)
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

It's basically *Ico* turned inside-out, requiring you to battle giant beasts across a huge empty land in order to save the life of a young girl.

PS2

We tend to shy away from hyperbole. We know that an overdose of positive words leads to a rush of euphoric hype, the inevitable comedown of which tends to be resentment towards a game that isn't as good as you had convinced yourself it was. Nonetheless, several years after its release, the vaguest mention of Fumito Ueda's *Ico* will elicit the most overwhelming streams of gushing praise you could ever wish to hear.

But for once the acclaim might be justified – for many gamers *Ico* is the pinnacle achievement of the current console generation. However, on reflection it would be hard to quantify the ripple Sony's title has sent through gaming by simply looking at its criminally low sales figures, its legend having spread thanks to internet forums and second-hand sales. Not even Ueda himself was prepared for the adulation his masterpiece received.

"To be honest, I was very surprised at the response I got on *Ico*," he says. "In many ways, the game was a challenging project. In the depth of my heart, though, I was worried as I was not sure whether some aspects of the game could be accepted. Even so, I was very surprised at the response from the games industry, and it is encouraging both for myself and the members of my staff that the game was received so favourably."

Ico became a hard act to follow, with the team uncertain as to what they should try next. "Normally, there would be talk of a sequel," recalls the game's producer, Kenji Kaido, "but here there was some opposition to that, along the lines of *Ico* being more than complete both in terms of gameplay and story, thus making the production of a sequel very difficult, and also questions about whether users wanted a sequel. After much consideration, we decided to try a new game."

And this new game, unveiled at the latest Tokyo Game Show, is *Wanda to Kyozou* (which roughly translates as *Wanda And Colossus*), a game not unlike *Ico* in many ways, but in others as far from its enclosed sensibilities as possible. "We spent a long time [four years] making *Ico*," says Ueda, "and we think that it was a very quiet game where the main character experienced an adventure while communicating with a girl in a closed environment. [*Wanda*] wasn't as a reaction or anything, but we wanted to make something a bit more flashy."

Like *Ico*, *Wanda to Kyozou* plunges gamers into a fantastical world of muted colours and glaring sunlight, and again tells the story of a young boy's quest to rescue a girl from the clutches of darkness. However, unlike *Ico*'s high-walled castle setting, the action of *Wanda* takes place across epic barren landscapes, which further accentuate the sensation of being dwarfed that *Ico* elicited so vividly.

The story opens with the boy carrying the unconscious Wanda across the sprawling land on his horse, before arriving at an altar. Upon laying the girl down a voice tells him that in order to reclaim her soul he must slay the giant mythical beasts that roam the nearby plains. The concept of fighting a giant enemy apparently first struck Ueda in 2002, and judging from the array of beasts we've seen it's a concept he's thoroughly explored in the last two years. Hulking behemoths mix with flying parasitic worms, each of which must be attacked using an entirely different strategy. Each also has a weak point which must be found in order to bring the monster down.

It's here, perhaps, that *Wanda* moves furthest away from the innocent curiosity

ICO SEE YOU

The announcement of *Wanda to Kyozou* was not your usual press-release-led affair. Rather, SCEJ set up a teaser website with a countdown to 10 September, which some gamers noticed contained the hidden word 'Nico' (the rumoured title for an *Ico* sequel). On 10 September, the website went live with a few early shots of *Wanda*, with another countdown to the first day of the Tokyo Game Show. It was on this date that the game was officially announced, and a short gameplay video stunned many witnesses into respectful silence. The movie can be seen at mms://stream.playstation.jp/scej/tgs2004/pv_wanda.wmv along with a selection of the game's monsters.

"UNLIKE ICO'S CASTLE SETTING, WANDA TAKES PLACE ACROSS EPIC LANDSCAPES"

WANDA TO KYOZOU

of *Ico*, but the various approaches to defeating these goliaths are puzzles in themselves – climbing up a giant's torso becomes a vertical maze, transplanting the climbing challenges from *Ico* onto a moving juggernaut. Some beasts even have pressure points which, when activated, change the physical layout of the maze and allow further access.

The more 'flashy' approach is also evident in the hero being able to scale walls and objects by running at them – similar to *Prince Of Persia* but on a much grander scale. The video at TGS showed a huge creature swinging his sword violently towards our plucky hero, which when dodged allowed him to run up the immense blade and onto the giant's arm.

Puzzles aside, the real beauty of *Ico* lay in the relationship between Ico and Yorda – their efforts to communicate despite not speaking the same language, their touching understanding and ability to co-operate. *Wanda to Kyozou* hopes to replicate the bond by pairing the hero with a wise horse, who will be semi-controlled but will be capable of following paths or evading obstacles. Ueda has suggested that "in addition to being the main character's companion, [the horse] has a supporting role in battle," and larger beasts will need to be chased down before they can be attacked.

More good news is that despite its larger-than-life pretensions, *Wanda* retains a great deal of *Ico*'s visual stylisation, to the extent that you could believe the stories take place in the same surreal universe. Ueda believes this unique aesthetic is a result of his team's collaboration. "When we began to work on *Ico*," he says, "we made sure to gather staff that did not have fixed ideas on games, so I think we had a consensus within the team. But we did try hard throughout the process of making *Ico* that the game would not resemble anything else as much as possible."

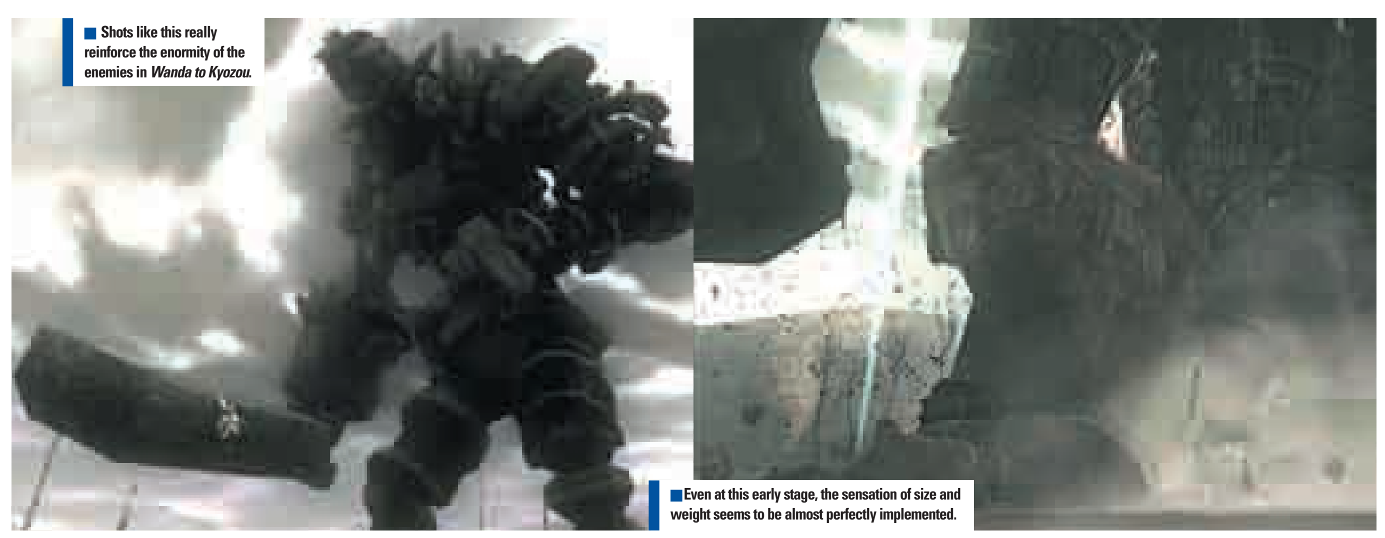
Accordingly, *Wanda to Kyozou* features *Ico*'s use of high-contrast black and white to add an ethereal quality to proceedings, with one sequence showing our hero hanging from the horn on a giant's forehead while a torrent of liquid darkness spews from the tip of the tusk. The parallel with the classic good/bad of human nature is an obvious one, but another of *Ico*'s strengths is the ambiguous nature of its setting and adventure, something Ueda is intent on restoring for its follow-up. "I play various types of game myself, and I think that the desire for destruction is also a human instinct," he says. "At the same time, it is in our instinct to protect something or someone, as Ico does in the game. I don't think one instinct is good and the other is bad. The game is not about good versus evil. Ico has his own reasoning and the queen has hers too. I wanted to leave the decision whether Ico did right or wrong to the player. But gaming inheres the aspect of escapism. I think that a good entertainment is one which can bring the viewers or the players back to reality in a positive mood."

Judging by the mythical status already achieved by his last PS2 title, Ueda is sure to enjoy more adulation when *Wanda* is released. We can only hope it becomes the classic it has the potential to be.

NATURAL BEAUTY

It's no coincidence that both *Ico* and *Wanda* focus upon movement and physicality – indeed, Fumita Ueda's emotional masterwork has fuelled many a student's 'but is it art?' debate since it was released. "If I was not in the games industry, I would want to become a classical artist," Ueda suggests. "I regard not only games but also anything which expresses something – be it films, novels or manga – as forms of art." This is an interest which Ueda indulged from an early age: "I was obsessed with catching living things, such as fish or birds. Other than that, I liked both watching and making animation. Basically, I seemed interested in things that moved." He even relates his first tentative gaming steps back to the same curiosity. "*Lemmings* impressed me as I sensed life on the TV screen for the first time in my life," he remembers. From *Lemmings* to *Ico* – we never saw that coming.

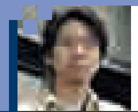
"THE VARIOUS APPROACHES TO DEFEATING THESE GOLIATHS ARE ACTUALLY PUZZLES IN THEMSELVES"



Shots like this really reinforce the enormity of the enemies in *Wanda to Kyozou*.

Even at this early stage, the sensation of size and weight seems to be almost perfectly implemented.

WANDA TO KYOZOU
PLAYSTATION2



PRODUCER PROFILE
Kenji Kaido has worked with Sony since 1999, starting on *Ape Escape*, which revolutionised PlayStation gaming by introducing DualShock control. In addition to producing *Ico*, he is also heading up the production team on *Wanda to Kyozou*, and will be hoping to bring some magic to the gaming table for a third time.

HISTORY
- **ICO** 2001 [PS2]
- **APE ESCAPE** 1999 [PSone]

"I PLAY VARIOUS TYPES OF GAME MYSELF, AND I THINK THAT THE DESIRE FOR DESTRUCTION IS ALSO A HUMAN INSTINCT"
FUMITA UEDA, LEAD ART DESIGNER, WANDA TO KYOZOU

Stone, metal, grass and sky – every texture in *Wanda* is identifiable, even from a distance.

THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Team Soho
RELEASE: 19 Nov
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Immerse yourself in a world where people talk funny and use needless swears in every sentence. No it's not a trip to Lidl, it's time to revisit the *Lock, Stock…* world of *The Getaway.*

COR BLIMEY, GUV'NA, THEY DON'T ARF SWEAR MUCH

Ever since *Grand Theft Auto III* proved that humorous 3D representations of real-life crime could massage money from gamers' pockets, publishers have been looking at ways to emulate this success. One of the most well-known copycat games was *The Getaway*, featuring an accurately rendered portion of London, lots of swearing and even more shooting. Localising the violence and drawing inspiration from *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels*, *The Getaway* was fairly successful. Successful enough for Sony to release a sequel, *The Getaway: Black Monday*, featuring more gunplay, more of our nation's capital (now 25 square miles) and more swearing.

Oh, the swearing. From what we've played so far, this game is about to make a terrible mistake. Real people just don't talk in the way they do here. You might turn the air blue if the situation necessitates it, but with *Black Monday*'s dialogue the swearing has been woven into sentences where it's not required simply to make the game 'funny' or to make it appeal to those too young to legally buy it. We're not prudes, it's just that the gratuitousness really grates.

Just as troublesome are the overblown cockney accents. We've been to London and we've never heard people talk like this – the vocals are very unnatural and seem to have been purposefully 'over-cockneyed' to appeal to the lucrative US audience's idea of what traditional Londoners sound like. Even though what we've been playing wasn't the final game, we'd wager the speech won't change at all – there simply isn't enough time to re-record a new script.

Moving away from the ham-fisted dialogue, a much more appealing element comes in the form of the three-way story. Those who've seen *Pulp Fiction* will remember the way in which it looked at different people and wove their lives into the paths of the others via significant events, playing 'scenes' from the film non-chronologically. *Black Monday* does something similar to this. Throughout the game you get to control three different people from widely different backgrounds and you further the story as you switch between them. The progress of the characters is intersected by events and twists, culminating in an ending based on decisions you've made during the game.

However, for this to work people will need to want to play the game through to the end and currently there are certain things (aside from the teeth-gratingly annoying accents) stopping the version we've played from being much fun. The camera is currently rather weak, handling corners in tight spaces with difficulty; the driving – while moderately improved over the previous outing – is still a little awkward; 'photorealistic' London looks pretty drab and lifeless; and progression through the missions is slow and boring.

This isn't looking like it's going to be much of a threat to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. While *Black Monday* has been something everyone has been looking forward to, it's not clear how many of its problems can be fixed within the small amount of time left. We know you're tempted to buy it – as you read this the game is either nearing release or already out – but you might want to wait until the reviews are in…

WRECKING CREW

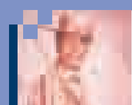
When playing *Black Monday* you're pitted almost against yourself in the sense that you control the fate of the good and bad characters. One of your personas is Sergeant Mitchell, a member of the Metropolitan Police firearms squad. On the other side of the city is Eddie O'Connor, a boxer in the middle of a bank job gone wrong. His whole is crew is dead and more bodies are dropping around him. And then there's Sam, a petty criminal and small-time thief who's much more comfortable stealing from cars or unoccupied houses than getting into full-on violence. Three different characters with different motivations and values. The question is, which character will engage you enough to make them your priority in the events ahead?

"VOCALS ARE UNNATURAL – PURPOSEFULLY 'OVER-COCKNEYED' TO APPEAL TO THE LUCRATIVE AMERICAN AUDIENCE"



■ Rooftop duelling is one of the things that makes us look forward to *Black Monday.*

■ Jasper, believing Nigel to be a 'slag', thought it best that they left the gallery forthwith…



MOCKNEY PROFILE

History is plagued with scores of unconvincing cockneys (or 'mockneys') responsible for – among many things – leading Americans to establish a widely incorrect view of how Londoners talk, which invariably leads to bitter disappointment when they visit. Americans often mistake real Londoners for Australians.

HISTORY

- **GUY RITCHIE** 1968 [Hertfordshire]
- **DAMON ALBARN** 1968 [Colchester]
- **DICK VAN DYKE** 1925 [US]

Unfortunately, the city doesn't look as good as it did before. The cars are still a bit wonky too.

"BLACK MONDAY GIVES PLAYERS THE REALISM OF FILM COMBINED WITH THE EXCITEMENT OF ACTION"
AMI BLAIRE, PRODUCT MARKETING DIRECTOR, SCEA

In this stage you take control of Sergeant Mitchell as he infiltrates a drug den in a council estate. Nice.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GOING UNDERGROUND

THE GETAWAY + LONDON UNDERGROUND - TUBE STRIKES = THE GETAWAY 2: BLACK MONDAY

EVERQUEST II



The brochure said 'secluded beach'. Nothing about a bloody great knight.

You know, life online can be better than the real world sometimes…

EVERQUEST II

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Sony Online Entertainment effectively invented the MMORPG genre with the 1999 release of *EverQuest*. Since then, the studio has gone on to publish seven expansion packs and enjoyed critical acclaim and commercial success with *Planetside* and *Star Wars: Galaxies*.

HISTORY

- **PLANETSIDE** 2003 [PC]
- **STAR WARS: GALAXIES** 2003 [PC]
- **EVERQUEST** 1999 [PC]



Teamwork, violence and over a hundred players – we can't wait to see this online.

THE GAME THAT LAUNCHED A LUDICROUS ACRONYM IS BACK WITH A FULLY FLEDGED SEQUEL

Few games can claim to have had as much influence over the genre to which they belong as *EverQuest*. Sony's massively multiplayer online RPG has been entertaining gamers since its launch in 1999, and through seven expansion packs the fictional world of Norrath has become a virtual home to millions. The inevitability of a sequel has been obvious for some time, and testing is currently at the beta stage. The premise, however, seems to be one of evolution rather than revolution.

The new game features 16 playable classes – 15 from *EverQuest* and just one new race, the Ratonga. Players will be able to choose between a 'good' and 'evil' alliance when they create their character and this will affect where they begin their adventure – the corrupt city of Freeport or the noble city of Qeynos. Interestingly, there will be no race-dependent class restrictions which means that the player will be able to be who they want to be, rather than finding themselves overly restricted because of their race (political correctness in a game? Whatever next?).

Players will be able to take this individualisation even further thanks to a wide range of cosmetic extras, including tattoos, face paint and hairstyles to produce a unique and immediately identifiable character. However, in keeping with the developer's ethos of making the game immediately accessible to newcomers, it won't be possible to import *EverQuest* characters into the sequel. In *EverQuest II*, everyone will begin from a standing start. However, don't be put off by the thought that this means the game will be 'dumbed down' for the mass market – after all, *EverQuest* itself was a mass-market success so there's no need to make concessions to get more gamers on board.

The way that newcomers will be enticed into the game is simple enough – the same rich, detailed game world that proved so popular in the original has been retained (and improved upon) but it will now be easier than ever before for gamers to dip into *EverQuest II* for a couple of hours at a time. Those who wish to dedicate more than that will certainly still be able to do so, but it is hoped that by offering the *EverQuest* experience in bite-sized chunks, more gamers will be drawn deep into the world of Norrath.

This is a plan backed up by an improved interface that makes getting quests much easier and generally makes gameplay feel much more streamlined without compromising on the detail. MMORPGs tend to have a reputation for intimidating newcomers with far too many complex instructions and statistics from the off; SOE has endeavoured to ensure that *EverQuest II* will ease newbies into the game at a speed they're comfortable with, but will allow veterans of online gaming to get down and dirty with the crux of the game from the off.

Stunning visuals are accompanied by an incredible amount of sound, with almost every NPC in the game having speech of some sort, with a total of over 100,000 lines of dialogue lasting for a total of 130 hours. Throw in the chance to stay at home and decorate your online pad in whatever way you see fit, virtually unlimited character digression, and a strong infrastructure of servers that should ensure smooth gameplay from day one and it isn't hard to see why *EverQuest II* is one of the most eagerly anticipated PC titles of the year.

"EVERQUEST II WILL EASE NEWBIES INTO THE GAME AT A SPEED THAT MAKES THEM FEEL COMFORTABLE"

GRAPHIC DETAIL

One of the most impressive elements of *EverQuest II* is the way it looks. The game was originally destined to share a graphics engine with *Star Wars: Galaxies* but as development gained pace it soon became apparent to SOE that each game had different demands, so work began in earnest on an original graphics engine for *EverQuest II*. The end product is certainly impressive, with lush forests teeming with flowers, and barren desert areas coming to life in remarkable detail. The graphics can, of course, be turned down so that the game will run on most average gaming machines (current minimum specs are a 64Mb graphics card and a 1Ghz processor) but if you've got the technology, prepare to be impressed…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment
RELEASE: 19 Nov
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Millions

CONCEPT

The most successful online RPG of all time is about to receive a sequel that does everything bigger and better than its predecessor.


eMag

ROGUE TROOPER

THERE'S A NU HERO IN TOWN

If you wanted to create a game containing a collection of innovative ideas, interesting heroes and mind-twisting plot-lines, but at the same time didn't want to do any of the legwork, then you needn't look any further than comic books. The mind of a comic writer is full of evil villains, bizarre vehicles and weapons that could remove a person's teeth at 40 paces, so it's no wonder that so many comic creations have made it onto our consoles in one form or another.

Rogue Trooper is one of *2000AD*'s most popular characters – in fact, he's second only to the mighty Judge Dredd himself – so any title that he blesses with his presence is going to reach an eager group of comic fans who'll be gagging to play as their hero. It almost seems too easy.

Based on Nu Earth, Rogue Trooper is a genetic infantryman who was part of a biologically engineered clone troop before his whole squad was wiped out by an unknown traitor. Obviously, this is to be a tale of revenge, but aside from Rogue's enhanced abilities that each clone comes with, he has a few extra attributes that give him the edge over his enemies. When his comrades fell, Rogue had the opportunity to save three of their personality chips and store them on his person. These extra personalities each have their own area of expertise and can aid Rogue on his journey by enhancing weapons, throwing grenades by means of a mechanical arm and giving tactical advice – handy chaps to have around when heading into battle.

From what we've seen thus far, this title is looking very similar to *Splinter Cell* with its heavy reliance on stealth and the third-person view. Hopefully, the idea of Rogue's extra personalities will be fully realised and, along with the glorious visuals we've seen, will help make this title more than an attempt to simply steal a patch of the stealth genre.

Slinging a popular character into a game may seem like a sure-fire way to shift a few units, but it doesn't always turn out that brilliantly. People don't tend to take it too well if you mess with their childhood hero, so if *Rogue Trooper* doesn't deliver then it could well take a beating SCi won't soon forget.



We get the feeling that despite Rogue being an all-action war hero, this will be a slow, tactical stealth game much like *Splinter Cell*.

> "ROGUE'S THREE EXTRA PERSONALITIES HAVE THEIR OWN AREAS OF EXPERTISE AND WILL HELP HIM OUT WHENEVER THEY CAN"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Rebellion
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBC

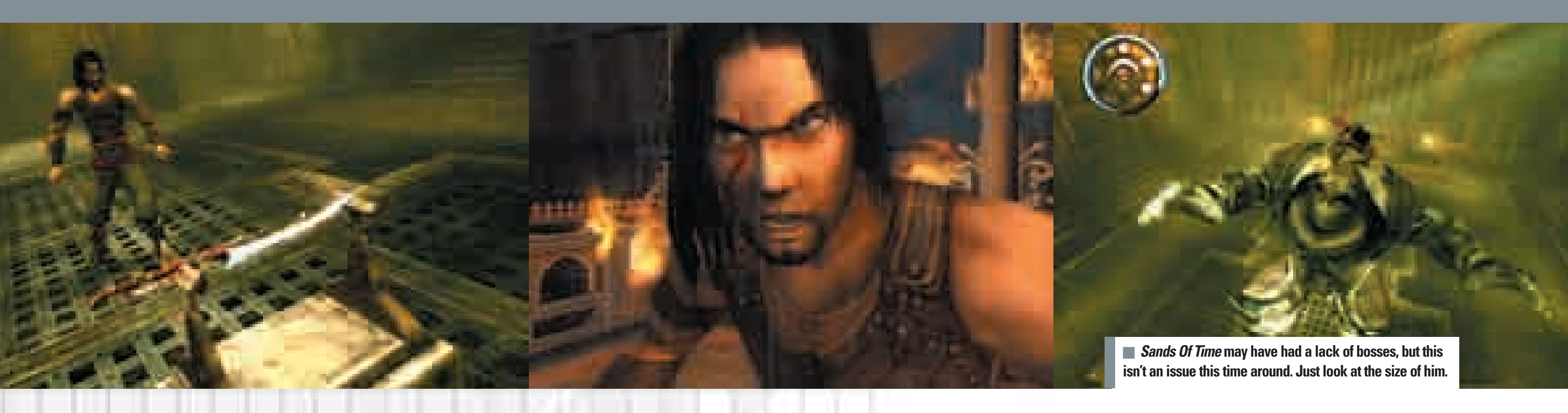
CONCEPT

Control a *2000AD* favourite and avenge your murdered friends. Simple.



Your three dead companions will hide in your belongings and give you help when you need it.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN



Sands Of Time may have had a lack of bosses, but this isn't an issue this time around. Just look at the size of him.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Nov '04
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

The Prince is back and he's moody. Playing with time and slaying demons are all in a day's work.

THE PRINCE IS BACK – AND IT'S ABOUT TIME

It's always sad to watch as carefree youngsters are thrust into the harsh reality of the world as they grow older, when the rose-tinted glasses are removed from their chubby little faces and they find that the world around them is actually not as playful and cuddly as they were led to believe. Father Christmas isn't real, the Tooth Fairy's actually your mum and – in a certain Prince's case – evil demons litter the world and it takes time manipulation and the agility of an acrobatic cat to stop them from terminating your existence.

These are among the lessons the Prince had drilled into his brain in the last *Prince Of Persia* title, *The Sands Of Time*, and he's grown into a very dark young man as a result. In *Warrior Within* the Prince has noticeably matured and looks more rugged and mysterious than before, and has thankfully developed skills to match.

If there was one element of *Sands Of Time* that slightly let down the otherwise superb package it was the fact that the fighting system – although impressive to start with – soon became pretty stale and dispatching hordes of foes became more of a routine rather than a battle of skill. Eager to correct this, the Prince has spent some time training himself up and has managed to master the ancient art of swashbuckling like no other gaming hero. To represent this boost in ability, a new free-form fighting system has replaced the old one and we'll now be able to enjoy a huge variety of moves and combos with which to take care of the host of new, scarier and all-round nastier enemies that will plague you throughout the game.

The environments also look to be more varied than they were in *Sands Of Time*. Although many levels will take the form of a series of trap-filled rooms, environments such as weather-beaten pirate ships have also been seen in action and stand to provide that little bit more variety.

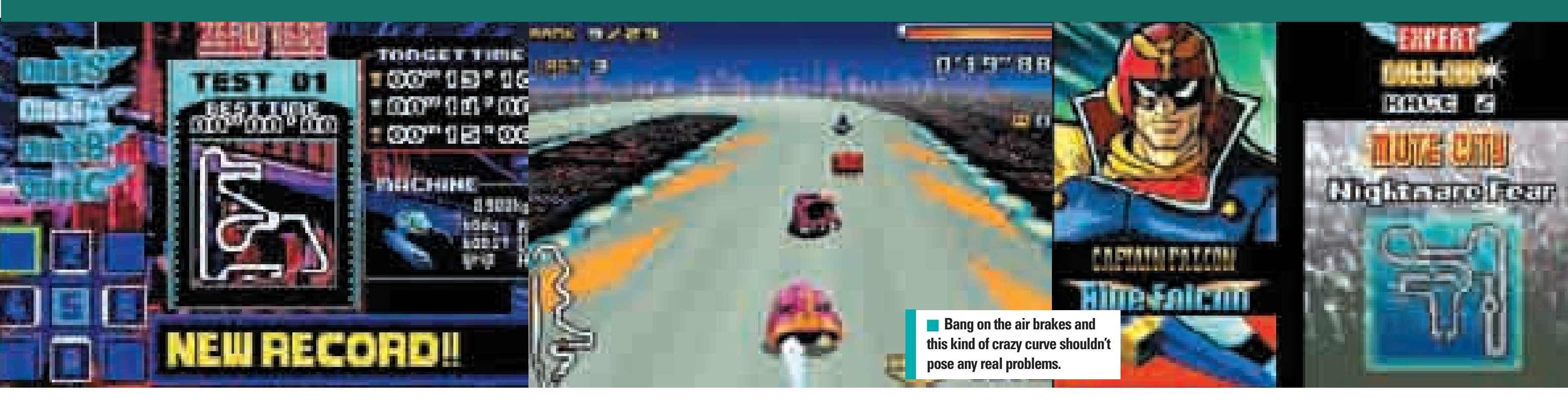
In the same way as *Sands Of Time* stunned us with its impressive visuals and attention to detail, *Warrior Within* looks set to treat us to yet more impressive sights. Ripping daggers through sails to slow your descent and wall-jumping combos galore should also keep action fans more than happy.

With the potential to surpass the quality of the last game so apparent, *Warrior Within* is giving us plenty of reasons to look forward to playing the full code.

The boyish looks are gone, replaced by a mysterious rugged look that the girlies will love.

"THE PRINCE HAS SPENT TIME IN TRAINING AND HAS MASTERED THE ART OF SWASHBUCKLING"

F-ZERO: CLIMAX



Bang on the air brakes and this kind of crazy curve shouldn't pose any real problems.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 2005 (Japan: Out Now, US: TBC)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Reach stomach-churning speeds and stake your claim on the ultimate title – Best Racer in the Universe. If you're any good, that is.

"I WANNA MAKE A SUPERSONIC MAN OUT OF YOU"

While the technologically superior home consoles may be a better showcase for the *F-Zero* series than a portable such as the GBA, there's a certain charm about the handheld variants that means we could never choose one over the other. Whether they're hitting our nostalgia nerves with similarities to the Mode 7 splendour of the SNES original or simply inducing awe at the incredible achievement of getting the game running so well on a three-inch screen, we'll always have time for Nintendo's high-speed racers.

So while it would be a cinch for Nintendo to bang out a slightly updated version of *GP Legend* with new tracks, it looks as though the new features that have been implemented for *F-Zero: Climax* should take it above and beyond this. For a start, a Course Edit option allows you to piece together your own tracks from a selection of tiles, much like the later 16-bit *Micro Machines* titles. Again like the Codemasters classics, these are saved and shared through a password system so expect the web to fill up with lengthy strings of characters that will create some horribly gruelling tracks.

Like its console brethren, *Climax* is tending towards an emphasis on battling, so two new moves for the GBA – the Spin Attack from the home versions and the Spin Booster, a combination of the whirling attack and a burst of speed as the name would suggest – help you drive more aggressively.

The game is still based on the anime series so aside from these few tweaks and revisions, *Climax* is much as you'd expect from the series on the GBA – as speedy, addictive and rewarding an experience as you'll find on a handheld until *Burnout* finds its way onto the PSP. There will also be support for Nintendo's new favourite toy, the Wireless Adapter, allowing remote rivalry with up to three other racers in continued support of the handy device.

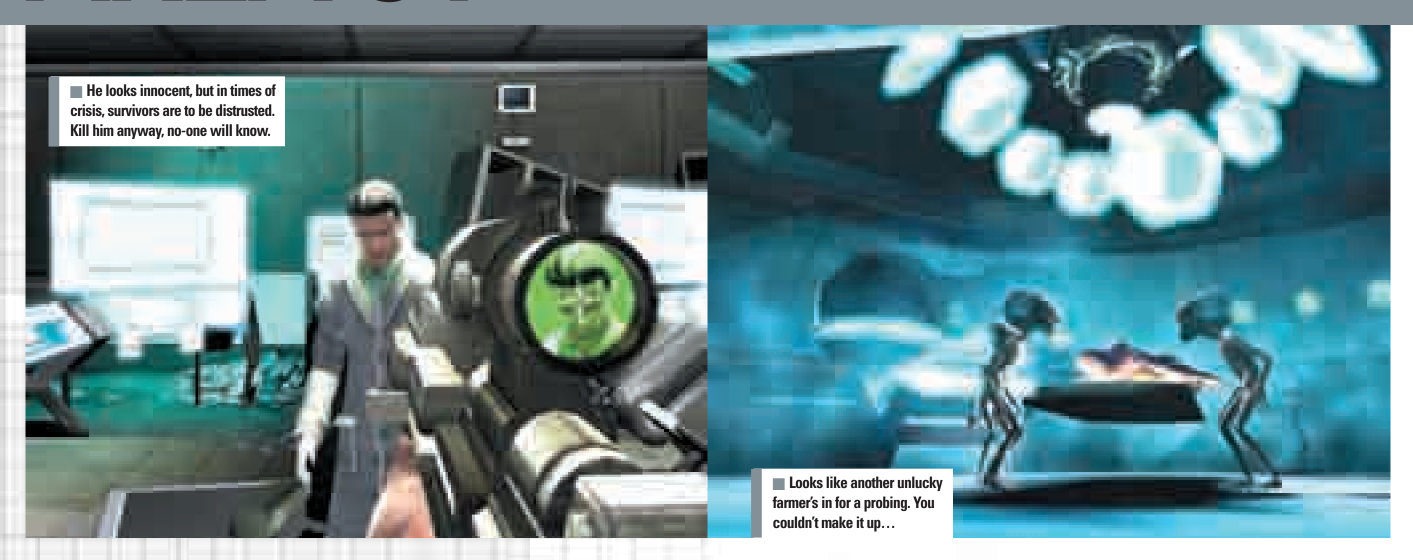
If you've torn up every course in *Maximum Velocity* and *GP Legend*, chances are you're looking forward to not just a selection of expertly designed tracks but a spread of your own, limited only by your imagination. If you've not ventured into the portable world of Captain Falcon, *Climax* should be as good a place as any to cut your teeth.

"THE EMPHASIS IN F-ZERO: CLIMAX IS ON BATTLING, AND TWO NEW MOVES HELP YOU DRIVE MORE AGGRESSIVELY"



It wouldn't be *F-Zero* without the death-defying jumps. So there are loads here.

AREA 51



He looks innocent, but in times of crisis, survivors are to be distrusted. Kill him anyway, no-one will know.

Looks like another unlucky farmer's in for a probing. You couldn't make it up…

LUCKY FOR YOU IT DOES EXIST

Despite the US government denying the existence of Area 51, it regularly makes its way into films, documentaries and videogames. For those of you who steer clear of the Sci-Fi Channel and are thus unaware of what Area 51 is said to be, conspiracy theorists suggest it's a top-secret military base where the US government is hiding extra-terrestrial secrets, including a crashed UFO and the autopsied bodies of its alien crew.

And there lies the theme to Midway's latest FPS. As Area 51 scientists try to understand alien technology, a viral outbreak caused by a lethal alien mutagen shuts down the facility, trapping the staff as the automated quarantine system kicks in. Taking control of Ethan Cole, a Special Forces expert from the Hazmat (hazardous materials) division, you and your team have to explore the ruined complex in an effort to assess the situation and set to work on a clean-up mission.

As you enter the building and embark on the jolly task of sweeping up dead scientists and mopping their sick from the walls, you stumble upon alien creatures and become infected with the mutagen yourself. Naturally, this starts to alter your form (as mutagens invariably tend to do), so now as well as your initial clean-up operation you've two more objectives on your to-do list: find out what the hell is going on and find a cure for your condition.

One peril you'll have to face are aliens. Midway is clearly hoping to hit paydirt with its little green men as it's drafted in the talents of four-time Academy Award winner Stan Winston, one of the film industry's most revered creature designers, to assist in the creation of the aliens and other mutations within the game. Expect to see the traditional egg-headed, oval-eyed quizzical types that appear on shows where an inbred American farmer tells of when he was taken into the sky, probed and then dropped 20 miles away. As well as these typical aliens, you'll also find scuttling face-hugger types and some almost human-looking mutant freaks carrying guns.

Despite Midway being keen to push the story element of the game and the plot that sees your character uncover the secrets of not just Area 51 but the 'faked' lunar landing, the trick *Area 51* has up its sleeve is shooting. Featuring satisfyingly loud and force feedback-laden gunplay with over ten man- and alien-made weapons, you spend your time gunning down hoards of aliens who either throw themselves at you or return your fire. As you wander through corridors and into large rooms, scripted events play out and you're required to quickly unleash waves of destruction while your team-mates run around shouting and screaming. *Area 51* looks like it could be pretty immersive stuff. The gunplay can be taken online too. Sixteen players can gather to participate in the usual array of online FPS options such as Deathmatch and Capture The Flag modes, choosing to be either a human or an alien character.

While *Area 51* is an interesting and fairly charming concept, with comfortable game mechanics making it very easy to get into, it's difficult to see where it fits in a horizon filled with top-quality FPS games. From what we've played, *Area 51* is fun but not in a revolutionary way. As such, it's looking doubtful this will be able to raise its head above big-hitting pre-Christmas 'sure things' like *Halo 2*. Thank God for its March release, then.

"YOU SPEND YOUR TIME GUNNING DOWN HORDES OF ALIENS WHO HURL THEMSELVES AT YOU OR RETURN YOUR GUNFIRE"

DETAILS

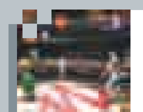
FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Negotiate your way through the top-secret Area 51 base gunning down aliens with a large variety of impressive weaponry, and perhaps uncovering a few secrets along the way.

I HEAR VOICES… FAMILIAR VOICES

Several A-list celebrities have been hired to voice some of the characters in *Area 51*. Taking the role of Ethan Cole is David Duchovny, star of *The X-Files*, while Powers Booth of *Deadwood* voices Major Bridges. Fittingly, the ever-unusual Marilyn Manson provides the voice of Edgar, the grey alien. This combines with the presence of Stan Winston – who created monsters and characters for films such as *Aliens, Edward Scissorhands, Jurassic Park* and *Terminator 3* – to show how much Midway believes in the quality of the title. Not every game gets a budget to hire 'talent', so it's clearly pinning a certain amount of hope on this. But will the gamble pay off? Can the game drag crowds away from the likes of *Halo 2*?



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Having been around for ages, Midway is most famous for developing the *Mortal Kombat* series of games, becoming a major player within the games industry in the process. Midway also has a sterling arcade heritage, having been responsible for all time greats such as *Smash TV*, *Joust* and *NBA Jam*.

HISTORY

- **READY 2 RUMBLE BOXING** 1999 [Dreamcast]
- **CRUIS'N USA** 1996 [N64]
- **MORTAL KOMBAT** 1992 [Arcade]

"AREA 51 WILL DELIVER A POLISHED EXPERIENCE ON PAR WITH THE BEST GAMES AVAILABLE"
MATT BROUGHTON, EUROPEAN MARKETING DIRECTOR, MIDWAY

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GUNS 'N' ALIENS

KILLZONE + X-FILES - SCULLY = AREA 51

Conspiracy nuts are bound to get off on the discovery of alien life in Area 51.

NARC



The non-existent 'Throw The Bottle Of Calpol At The Bearded Man' sub-game.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 2005
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Track down the source of a new drug but try not to get addicted to the stuff…

BECAUSE DRUGS ARE BAD, M'KAY?

Midway isn't afraid to wander through its back catalogue wearing a huge pair of clown shoes, crushing the good name of many an old classic into the ground. *Defender* was kicked into the modern world and couldn't take it, while *SpyHunter 2* didn't remember what made the remake of *SpyHunter* so palatable. So we come to *Narc*, a rethink of 1988's two-man side-scrolling war on drugs.

Though popular and despite notoriety, the original game never reached the height of fame of Midway's other titles. This could be very good news since the company does a mad line of games that are better the less you've heard of them. This insane logic is proved by the excellence of *Psi-Ops*, a game so good it never existed in arcades during the Eighties.

Happily, the original *Narc* is only being used as a texture study since this new incarnation only borrows a few ideas. The game features two cops who take on a drug baron with fists, guns and optional

"LET'S JUST HOPE THE DEVELOPER REMEMBERS EXACTLY HOW BORING PEOPLE ON DRUGS CAN BE"

dependency on class-A drugs while the game's structure is totally modern and thus suitably open. Yes, it's moral choice time as you choose to be either a good or bad cop. Bad cops sell and take drugs and beat up informants, while good cops still get to kick the living hell out of anyone deemed a danger, but generally go for clean arrests and wouldn't take drugs even if they were about to give birth to a giant cactus.

Yes, drugs. *Narc*'s drugs, if taken, give a temporary boost depending on your chosen poison – LSD, for example, makes crims appear as demons while marijuana slows the game to a mellow pace. Take too many naughty things and you'll black out or get addicted and have to fight off withdrawal symptoms via sporadic rhythm sections. You'll also need to pass drug tests that, if failed, will see you demoted to a regular beat cop; a beat cop addicted to drugs who won't have access to Narc Squad crime files and therefore the game's missions until they clean up their act.

With voice talent supplied by rent-a-croakers Michael Madsen, Ron Perlman and Michael Wincott, Midway is going for a tough and edgy feel suitable for a mature audience. Let's just hope it remembers how boring people on drugs can be…





Even hardened crims weren't impressed by *SpyHunter 2*'s review scores.


eMag

PHANTOM BRAVE





WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: Nippon Ichi
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Think and fight your way through hundreds of hours of beautiful RPG action as the story of a young girl with power over spirits builds and develops into so much more.

PS2 **Like random encounters and spiky haired teenagers, forced levelling up is one element of RPG life that you'll either accept as part of the genre or despise with all of your bitter, level-37 heart.** If ever a game has taken this element to the extreme, Nippon Ichi's *Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness* is a megalomaniac's dream. While the core quest can be completed with characters below level 100, the option is there to build your squad well into the thousands, almost into five figures if you dare… or can find time, given that there's another chunk of your life waiting to be destroyed by *Phantom Brave*.

Stylistically and in terms of the largely menu- and story-led nature of the game, *Phantom Brave* differs very little from *La Pucelle* or *Disgaea*. This could put up something of a barrier to those who have already invested weeks into levelling up Laharl. At the same time, though, there's something comforting about going into an adventure (especially one that could last hundreds of hours) safe in the knowledge that you're 'among friends'.

Nippon Ichi's style, humour and flair for keeping presentation and gameplay of an equally high standard have yet to let us down and these similarities – as well as the odd cameo from an old friend – are a good reminder of such. A well-acted voice-over adds to the character too, bringing the game closer to its anime inspirations.

But this familiarity doesn't extend too far into the main game, and once battle commences you can't fail to notice Nippon Ichi's first major alteration. Gone are the chequered environments of just about every strategy game you might care to mention, replaced with free movement within a speed-determined area. Character activity now depends very much on speed, so while your burlier spirits may trundle towards foes at a pitiful rate, sprightly sprites will move faster and more often.

> "INSTEAD OF YOUR USUAL PORTAL OR DEPLOYMENT ZONES, ALLIES ARE SUMMONED FROM OBJECTS IN THE FIELD"

Said apparitions make for some of the game's quirkiest touches. Lead character Marona is the only living character you'll get to play but her power over spirits has earned her the title of 'possessed', not to mention all the fear and resentment that goes with it. But it's not your ghostly comrades that surprise so much as your way of calling them into action. Instead of the usual portal or deployment zones, allies are summoned from objects in the field – a rock, for instance, will produce a hardier version of the phantom you choose whereas foliage might make your spirit slightly quicker at the expense of strength.

This brings extra elements of strategy into what is already a very tactical experience, and by using certain environmental objects to call your troops into physical existence they can be powered up further still. This is slightly confusing at first, perhaps, but before you know it there'll be creatures and warriors popping out of everything and anything.

Despite easing the player in relatively smoothly, there can be little doubt that *Phantom Brave* gives you an awful lot of information to take in and use. We're still not sold on the debut of free movement but the scope it will bring to more complex battles should work for the game in the long run. If nothing else, we'll have somewhere to go when all our *Disgaea* team hit Level 9,999.

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

While most strategy games are happy to let you fight for high ground or hide behind things, Nippon Ichi has always taken things one step further. Earlier titles have allowed warriors to pick up environmental objects and even enemies but *Phantom Brave* takes things to the next level, leaving virtually no part of the scenery out of the action. Be it picking up rocks, throwing enemies out of the level, using some debris or conjuring allies from anything you can find, you'll need your wits about you if you're to get anywhere in the world of *Phantom Brave*.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Having recently established operations in Europe, Koei has earned a reputation for bringing games that would otherwise never leave Japan to both the US and Europe. New ties with Nippon Ichi can only see this trend continue.

HISTORY

- **GITAROO MAN** 2002 [PS2]
- **DYNASTY WARRIORS** 1997 [PSone]
- **GEMFIRE** 1992 [Mega Drive]

■ Each type of weapon develops unique skills as it levels up, resulting in some devastating blows.

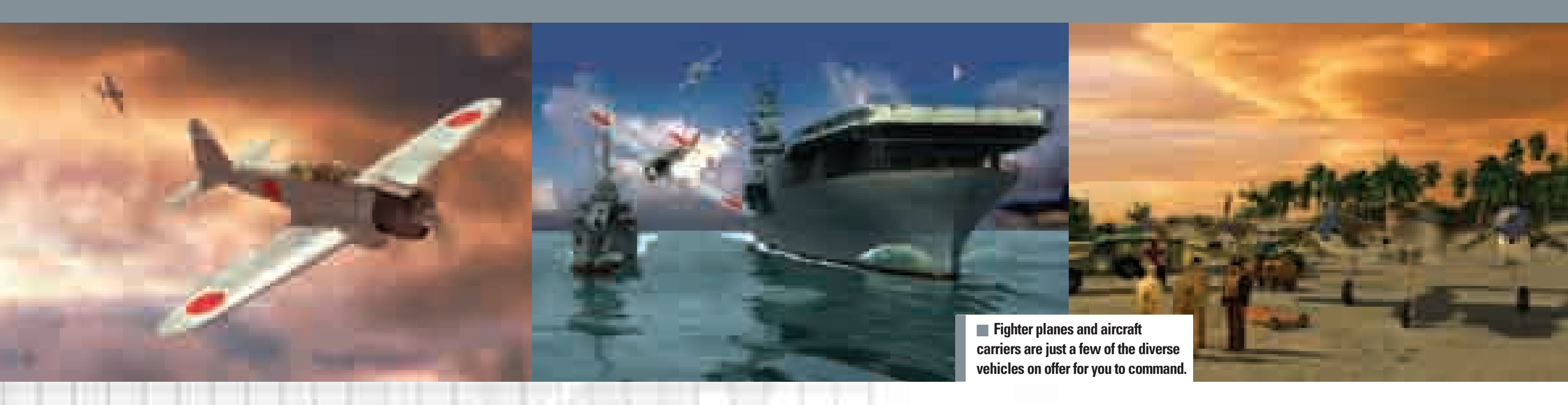
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GETTING INTO THE SPIRIT OF THINGS

DISGAEA - GRIDS x THE OCCULT = PHANTOM BRAVE

■ Field conditions (shown in the bottom left) affect thrown enemies and quick movements.

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY



Fighter planes and aircraft carriers are just a few of the diverse vehicles on offer for you to command.

RTS OR ACTION? MITHIS MEETS US HALFWAY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Hungary
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Mithis
RELEASE: Q2 '05
GENRE: Action RTS
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

Take part in one of the world's most famous conflicts and see if you have what it takes to lead your men to victory.

PS2

For those who were dozing peacefully at the back during history lessons, the battle of Midway is considered to be one of the greatest naval battles ever and is widely thought to be the turning point in the struggle for the Pacific during WWII. That's right, it was a naval battle. Boats, planes and plenty of blue wet stuff are what you can expect to see here, which will make a welcome change from re-storming that damn beach during the Normandy landings or taking control of the French resistance as they attempt to place yet more markers for US paratroopers.

Battlestations: Midway is definitely an ambitious title. It's aiming to take the form of an RTS that doesn't really look or feel at all like an RTS. Rather than the resource collecting, group commands and traditional top-down view that are usually associated with any good RTS, Mithis has opted to create a more personal experience by allowing you to switch between each unit under your command and either pilot or captain it yourself. The master plan is to essentially remove all the hassle and penny-pinching that usually concerns a player during an RTS and focus only on the tactical and action side of things.

While in control of a vehicle you'll switch to a first-person view and be given full control over that one unit, you can then issue whatever commands you feel will aid your attack on the Japanese. This way of playing an RTS is bound to lure many a gutsy player into thinking they could just go it alone and foolishly take on an entire fleet with a single recon plane – but of course the RTS nature of the game will soon prove this untrue.

As fun as it may be bringing a single dive-bomber into battle, rising to an impressive altitude and then hurtling down towards your battleship target with a mind to blowing it to bits, this will almost definitely result in a fiery lump of metal that vaguely resembles a plane splash-landing into the chilly waters of the Pacific. In short, tactical play and teamwork will be as essential to success as ever.

With the promise of plenty of units and the possibility of around 16 players online, this could be an interesting variation on the battle re-enactment theme, but we'll let you know for sure when review time comes around.

> "MIDWAY IS AIMING TO TAKE THE FORM OF AN RTS THAT DOESN'T REALLY LOOK OR FEEL AT ALL LIKE AN RTS"



Rather than storming beaches, as in most wartime RTS games, you can now crash into them.

Options for hilariously calling your men Goose, Iceman and so on have not been confirmed.


eMag

PARIAH



"DIGITAL EXTREMES HAS A TRACK RECORD FOR CREATING INCREDIBLY ENTERTAINING GAMES, SO WE KNOW HOW IMPRESSIVE PARIAH IS GOING TO BE"
JON WALSH, CEO, GROOVE GAMES

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

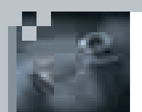
GIVING YOU THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT - UNREAL + SINGLE PLAYER = PARIAH

The improved AI over that of *Unreal Tournament* means that you'll have your hands full dealing with the hordes of enemy forces.



PARIAH
XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Having started out as a small shareware developer in 1993, Canada-based Digital Extremes has become a leading authority in first-person shooters. The company's founder, James Schmalz, is responsible for the creation of the *Unreal* series, which has allowed Digital Extremes to build up a huge reputation for creating quality FPS titles.

HISTORY

- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004** 2004 [PC]
- **UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP** 2002 [Xbox]
- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003** 2002 [PC]

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

Considering *Half-Life* was probably the last FPS we played with the perfect mixture of a hugely absorbing story-driven single-player game and some quality multiplayer action, we have to ask the question: why is it such a difficult balance to strike? While we don't claim to know the answer, it's nice to see one developer – Digital Extremes, creator of the *Unreal* series – trying to prove that Valve's FPS classic wasn't some kind of fluke.

The good news is that *Pariah* may have succeeded where others have failed. True, the game owes much to the developer's *Unreal* roots – elements such as the graphical style and the AI routines have been borrowed and improved to provide *Pariah* with a solid base – but while the pedigree of the action is only to be expected from a studio with so much experience in FPS games, it's the quality of *Pariah*'s plot that makes all the difference.

Working with Hollywood scriptwriters has allowed Digital Extremes to create an immersive and exciting world of the future, where Earth is a giant prison colony, life-threatening viruses are rife and conspiracy is widespread. The developer is keeping mum on the specifics of the plot (outside of you playing a burnt-out doctor who finds a routine quarantine mission turning into a fight to survive for you and your patient), but it's enough to pique the interest of anyone bored of mindless FPS outings.

But while Digital Extremes is keen to talk up the qualities of *Pariah*'s single-player experience (a fair point, considering how much effort has gone into making the game as story-driven as it is gunplay-based), that's not to say that the multiplayer is being neglected. Indeed, the developer has clearly spent time devising ways of making sure that *Pariah*'s multiplayer action surpasses that of its *Unreal* titles, specifically by shifting the focus towards more tactical gameplay.

At the centre of this strategy are Energy Cores, items left behind by fallen foes that take the place of standard FPS pick-ups. As they have a range of benefits – increasing ammunition, enhancing shields, upgrading weaponry or simply recovering health – it's more about how you decide to use them than it is about how quickly you can steal them from under your enemy's nose.

This strategy even extends outside the survivalist modes to encompass the team-based parts of multiplayer, with Cores being tradeable between members of the same team. It's here that defining roles within each side can prove crucial. Through tactical use of Cores you can create powerful weapons for your heavy gunners, have medics using healing skills and so on. Indeed, the focus on team gameplay is apparent, with most of *Pariah*'s five multiplayer modes emphasising co-operation – favourites such as Team Deathmatch and Capture The Flag remain, albeit with the addition of vehicles and upgradeable weaponry, while the newly created Frontline Assault mode sees *Pariah* attempting to mimic a frontline, with both sides pushing the battlefront back and forth until one emerges victorious.

Of course, some may take Digital Extremes' promises with a pinch of salt, particularly as its claims are somewhat ambitious, but we're convinced *Pariah* is an exciting prospect that needs your attention.

> **"DIGITAL EXTREMES HAS ALL THE EXPERIENCE NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT PARIAH WILL BE AN INCREDIBLY POLISHED FPS"**

TALKIN' ABOUT CREATION

Having learnt lessons from *Unreal* about the importance of creating a community, Digital Extremes is working hard to ensure that there's plenty for players of *Pariah* to share amongst themselves. The biggest part of this is the game's Level Editor that's as complex as you make it; while long-standing creative types can take advantage of everything the editor has to offer, inexperienced users can still put together detailed multi-level arenas using just a few button presses and menus. With the option to then share your creations with your friends or upload them for everyone to download, we suspect this will be one of the most popular aspects of *Pariah*. Besides the blasting, of course.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Groove Games/Hip Interactive
DEVELOPER: Digital Extremes
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)

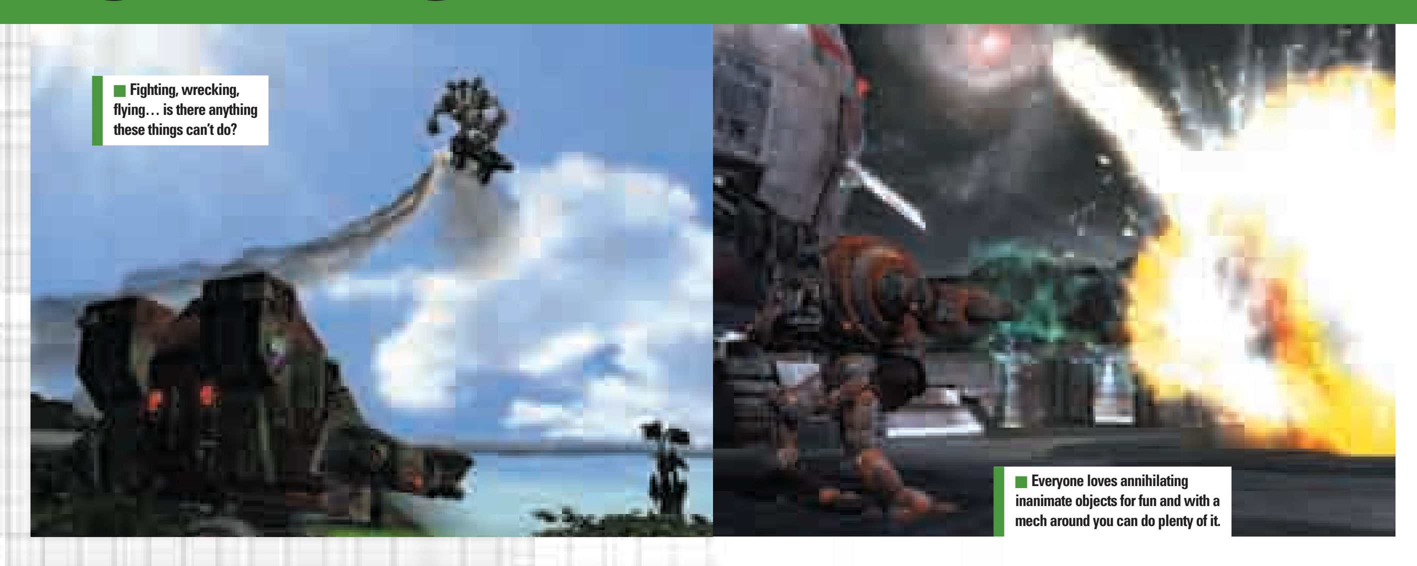
CONCEPT

Digital Extremes uses its *Unreal* experience to create an FPS that offers what it hopes will be the best of both single-player and multiplayer blasting.



Pariah promises 19 single-player chapters spread over a wide variety of environments, most of which are stunning.

MECHASSAULT 2: LONE WOLF



■ Fighting, wrecking, flying… is there anything these things can't do?

■ Everyone loves annihilating inanimate objects for fun and with a mech around you can do plenty of it.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Day 1
RELEASE: Jan '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

■ Massive machines, massive weapons and massive destruction are what mech games are all about and this looks set to be one of the best yet.

NOW THAT'S SOME SERIOUS METAL GEAR

The mech. It's got to be the ultimate in transportation, hasn't it? You can keep the Ford Fiesta and Nissan Micra, we'd take hulking great metallic suits any day of the week. Every kind of weaponry protruding from near-impenetrable armour, death and destruction being dealt with each giant step taken – you'd be an unstoppable killing machine. Well, nearly unstoppable. Other mechs would stand a chance of putting an end to your antics and would probably give it a go. Fighting would break out and a war fought inside mechanical monsters would begin. It's the stuff dreams are made of.

When Day 1 gave us *MechAssault* back in 2002, it quickly became one of the most popular Xbox Live games of the moment and still receives plenty of play time to this day. The wealth of modes and extra downloadable content is what sets the game apart, but now – after two long years – the sequel's on its way and will attempt to improve on the experience even further. *MechAssault 2* looks set to better the original in almost every way, and both the online elements and single-player campaign will be polished and enhanced in order to ensure that nothing of what was so loved in the first game is lost, despite delivering new elements and experiences.

A key difference between this title and the first game will be the ability to leave your mech and venture out on foot. With everyone else stomping around inside over-sized vehicles, this may seem a little foolish but this will allow you to seize control of other vehicles that might suit your needs better.

If you find yourself in a situation where you're in desperate need of a speedy VTOL (Vertical Take Off Vehicle) rather than a machine of mass destruction you can simply seek one out and attempt to hack into it. If an enemy is already piloting your target vehicle you'll engage in a hacking mini-game to see who keeps possession. If successful, you can giggle to yourself as your unfortunate foe is ejected from his machine and you leave to destroy more of his kind from the safety of his old vehicle. This new feature should make online confrontations even more tense, and with the new, larger range of vehicles – including tanks, aircraft and bigger mechs than ever before – tactical play will be essential if you don't want to end up as a large pile of scrap metal.

PEOPLE PERSON

When playing the first *MechAssault* it was easy to believe that you were in control of a living machine rather than a person sitting in the cockpit of a huge metal robot. The humans running the show were never seen and were only ever represented by the occasional voice that barked orders at you when a new mission arose. This is an element that Day 1 has completely changed for *MechAssault 2* and now not only will you see the highly detailed faces of characters that you came across in the first game (such as Foster and Natalia), but you'll actually be encouraged to leave the safety of your metal giant in order to change vehicles, hack into other robots and venture into buildings.

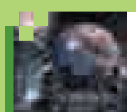
"XBOX LIVE ALLOWS YOU TO INFORM YOUR MATES IF YOU'RE RECEIVING A HAMMERING AND THEY CAN LEAP TO YOUR AID"

As well as all the regular modes you'd expect to find online, such as skirmishes and Capture The Flag, there will also be a brand new Conquest mode. This will be a persistent online world consisting of 45 different planets that will, at launch, be divided equally between five houses. When you first sign into Conquest mode you'll be asked to select which house you wish to fight for. Once a house has been selected you can join an existing clan or create your own so you and your friends can set about aiding your house in the acquisition of the galaxy. You'll even be able to send messages to friends who are offline thanks to the link between GamerTags and Passport accounts, so you can inform your mates if you're getting a hammering and they can leap heroically to your aid.

From what we've seen, *MechAssault 2* is a very promising sequel, and we get the feeling we're going to be putting in some serious online hours upon its release early next year.

MECHASSAULT 2: LONE WOLF

XBOX



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Day 1 Studios is an independent development studio that operates from offices in Chicago, Illinois, and Hunt Valley, Maryland. Day 1 is the company behind the first *MechAssault* game that took Xbox Live by storm back in 2002.

HISTORY

■ **MECHASSAULT** 2002 [Xbox]

"THIS THIRD-PERSON ACTION/SHOOTER GAME DEFINES IMMENSE DESTRUCTION"

MECHASSAULT 2 PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BIGGER, BADDER AND HEAVIER THAN THE LAST

MECHASSAULT × DESTRUCTION + MORE HUMANS = MECHASSAULT 2

■ Here we see the mech in its natural environment. Just look at it run and play.


eMag

CONSTANTINE

SCI GOES TO HELL AND BACK

PS2 **Comic-book heroes are being hurled at the big screen and then onto our consoles at an alarming rate.** Clearly not wanting to be unfashionable, Hellblazer Comics' John Constantine is set to be another of these heroes when when his Keanu Reeves-starring movie and licensed game arrive next February.

Constantine isn't nearly as well known as, say, Spider-Man, but that's possibly due to the bleakness of the comic. After smoking heavily and dying from lung cancer, Constantine tricks three devils into releasing him from Hell. With their death-dealing abilities revoked, the devils are forced to cure him and send him back to the world of the living. Now blessed with otherworldly powers, Constantine continues to smoke, is diagnosed with cancer again and decides to play out his second batch of dying days as a supernatural detective. Dark stuff indeed.

Taking the form of a third-person action adventure, *Constantine* will follow the adventures of Mr C as he investigates the murder of a young girl who got herself involved with a cult. Of course, the demonic forces of Hell will be out in force to get in his way and it's up to our anti-hero to put an end to their mischief. Being of comic origin, Constantine will be armed with many ingenious spirit-slaying gadgets including a Holy Shotgun, which fires crucifix-shaped shells, and the Witches' Curse, a pistol that launches small chunks of the road to Damascus. No, really.

> "ARMED WITH A PISTOL THAT FIRES BITS OF THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS, CONSTANTINE IS NOT A MAN TO BE MESSED WITH"



The dead are springing to life and there are demons everywhere – the last place you want to be is a morgue.

Constantine's most useful gift is his ability to travel back to Hell whenever he wants. Rather than being represented by smouldering underground caverns, Hell will simply be a more fiery and effects-laden version of the real world and will provide puzzles and alternate routes through levels in much the same way as the Spirit World did in *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance*.

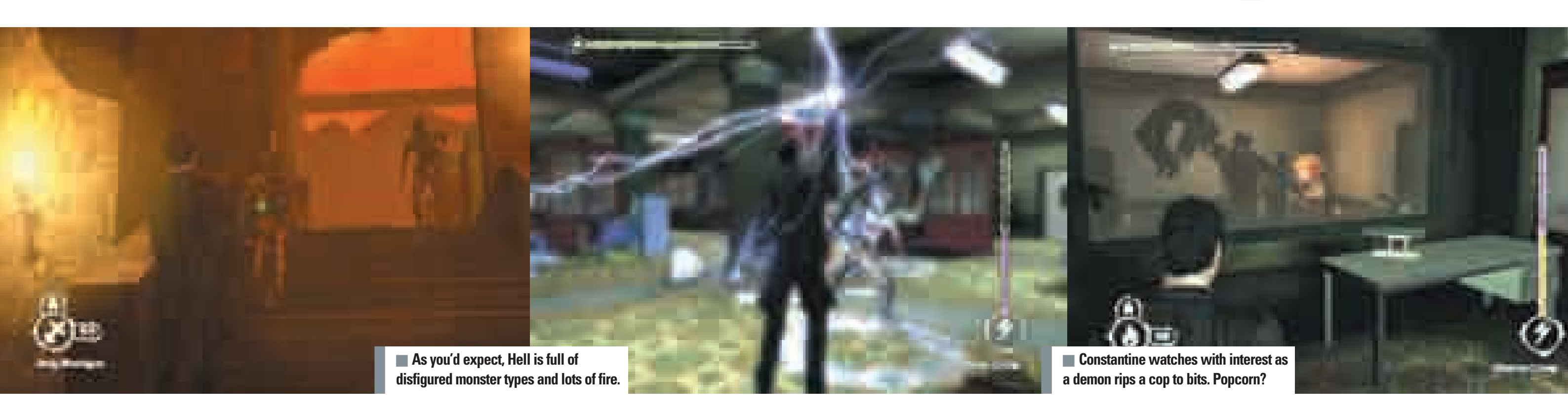
What we've seen so far looks good enough, but our faith in licensed movie titles has taken a beating recently (*Chronicles Of Riddick* and *Star Wars Battlefront* excepted) and we won't recommend this until we've seen everything the game has to offer.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Bits Studios
RELEASE: Feb '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

You're a near-dead 'tec who must solve creepy crimes and save the world.



As you'd expect, Hell is full of disfigured monster types and lots of fire.

Constantine watches with interest as a demon rips a cop to bits. Popcorn?

SNIPER ELITE



Careful planning is essential for getting that kill – gung-ho gunplay counts for nothing here.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: TBC
DEVELOPER: Rebellion
RELEASE: Q1 '05
GENRE: Stealth Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2 (1-4 Online)

CONCEPT

Use your sniping skills to stop nuclear secrets going astray.

NOT THE KIND THAT RUINS YOUR FUN ON EBAY

While we're sound enough of mind to enjoy violent games without feeling the need to rush out and earn an extended stay at one of Her Majesty's 'special hotels', there's still the odd moment in gaming where you simply cringe at your own sadism. A lengthy stretch of *Psi-Ops* brutality can provoke such responses, as can the massacres of the *Soldier Of Fortune* games, but there are few games out there that can combine this self-doubting sensation with one of sheer accomplishment so well as *Sniper Elite*'s face-shattering long-range deaths.

There's nothing quite like the sense of almost sick satisfaction of gauging a long-range shot for several minutes before seeing your projectile spin towards its target and really make its mark. Or indeed the feeling of elation that comes from a single bullet searing through the flesh of two, three or even four foolishly clustered enemies and watching them topple like dominos.

"BETWEEN THE EYES, STRAIGHT THROUGH THE HEART, IN THE GROIN – SNIPER ELITE IS AS EVIL OR EFFICIENT AS YOU ARE"

Such is the nature of the game that while there may not be a huge amount of enemies in the sprawling and realistic Berlin locations, the reward for a well-executed attack is almost overwhelming. Rebellion has also managed to capture a real sense of paranoia and mortality that so many games forsake in favour of arcade thrills, so using your binoculars before rushing headlong across a seemingly empty street is a must. After all, any one of those windows could be hiding your would-be assassin.

One of the developer's aims has been to avoid a lot of the linearity often associated with war games, a feat that it seems to have pulled off judging by the sections we've played. Each level has multiple routes to reach objectives, and the fact that enemies vary in position with each play means that you'll always be on edge.

But it's the attention to detail that really cements *Sniper Elite* as one to watch for 2005 – everything from wind and gravity to heart rate and breath will affect each shot you take, and with the appropriate skills you'll even be able to use shots to distract guards, detonate TNT and take down tanks by either killing the driver through the tiny viewfinder or sniping off the fuel cap for a pyrotechnic feast. If nothing else, we're really looking forward to recreating that thousand-metre shot for ourselves…



A demonstration of why supreme confidence needs to be backed up with supreme skill. Crazy fool.


eMag

GHOST RECON 2



Can't see the enemy from your current vantage point? No problem – now you can just look, and shoot, round corners.

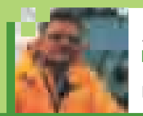
> "WHERE THE ORIGINAL GHOST RECON FEATURED AWARD-WINNING MULTIPLAYER LEVELS, ITS SEQUEL WILL BE SECOND TO NONE"
> *FLORENCE ALBERT, MARKETING DIRECTOR, UBISOFT*

34m

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SOUPED-UP BEYOND RECOGNITION

GHOST RECON + RAINBOW SIX 3 + TINKERING = GHOST RECON 2



AUTHOR PROFILE

Born on 12 April 1947, Tom Clancy is best known for his many political thrillers such as *The Hunt For Red October*, *The Cardinal And The Kremlin* and *Red Rabbit*. In 1996 the author co-founded Red Storm Entertainment with Doug Littlejohns, with the aim to deliver a new type of multimedia entertainment.

HISTORY

- **GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM** 2004 [PS2]
- **TOM CLANCY'S ROGUE SPEAR** 2002 [GBA]
- **BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE** 2000 [PC]

TOM CLANCY'S GHOSTS ARE BACK WITH A WHOLE NEW PERSPECTIVE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Red Storm Entertainment
RELEASE: 19 Nov
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-16 Online)

CONCEPT

The Ghosts return with brand new gameplay elements, console-friendly gameplay and a third-person viewpoint. But will Red Storm's changes prove popular?

When *Ghost Recon* appeared on the Xbox in 2002 (and later on the PS2 as *Jungle Strike*) it proved to be a title that still divides the team to this day. While we enjoyed its strategic, atmospheric pace, the foggy visuals and convoluted controls made its PC roots far too obvious. Luckily, *Ghost Recon*'s first true sequel (no, *Island Thunder* doesn't count) is a completely different beast and has more in common with *Rainbow Six 3* than the original game.

The most obvious improvement is how much better everything looks. While the locations of *Ghost Recon* perfectly captured the great outdoors, the fog and dull textures left a lot to be desired. Now, *Ghost Recon 2* boasts intricately detailed environments that are both richly textured and wonderfully atmospheric. Whether you're making your way through a battle-scarred city or hiding in the dense North Korean jungle you'll be impressed by the realistic locations.

An enhanced soundtrack complements the improved visuals – team-mates yell frantically for help when they've been gunned down, bullets zip past you with a terrifying whine and explosions erupt around you with such frightening clarity that you'll wish you'd turned the 5.1 surround sound off.

Despite all these aesthetic tweaks, it's the gameplay that's seen the most changes and, fortunately, they all appear to be for the better. Rather than split your time between two squads, *Ghost Recon 2* now gives you just one group of Ghosts to look after. This not only helps to up the pace of the game, but also allows you to respond to enemy attacks a lot quicker. Fans may be surprised to find they're no longer able to play as each squad member and have to employ the new 'over the shoulder' viewpoint, but purists can still play the game in the 'traditional' first-person mode.

Taking a similar approach to *Rainbow Six 3*, you control squad leader Capt Scott Mitchell and simply issue commands to your other Ghosts. Suppressing fire, manning enemy turrets and performing flanking moves are never more than a button press away and you can even use your gun's reticule to tell your group where to head next. While it creates a smoother play experience that's better suited to the console market, the changes may be just a little too much for fans of the original.

The new Lone Wolf mode is a huge departure for the series. Rather than control a whole squad, you're on your own with only the latest hi-tech weaponry to aid you. Of course, when you've got a gun that allows you to look (and fire) around corners things turn slightly in your favour. And did we mention your Lone Wolf is able to call down deadly air strikes?

Add some new multiplayer modes (including one that pits one Lone Wolf against a team of Ghosts) and it's obvious that Ubisoft and Red Storm are doing everything they can to ensure that *Ghost Recon 2* is a worthy sequel. Let's just hope it doesn't become another casualty of the festive war.

> "IT'S THE GAMEPLAY THAT HAS SEEN THE MOST CHANGES AND, FORTUNATELY, THEY ALL APPEAR TO BE FOR THE BETTER"

DIFFERENT CONSOLES, DIFFERENT GAMES

Rather than deliver identical games across multiple formats, Red Storm has played up to each machine's strengths and made two different versions of *Ghost Recon 2*. The PS2 game sounds much more action-oriented than its Xbox peer, with set-pieces like the air strikes looking particularly devastating, and it's bound to go down well with fans of *SOCOM*. The main story is also new and takes place seven years before the Xbox version (although they're both set in North Korea). The biggest differences, though, are in the online modes. Although both consoles will feature online options and modes, the Xbox will boast additional modes such as Recon, Defend and Firefight and will also allow you to play the Campaign mode co-operatively.



Ghost Recon is frighteningly realistic, so expect to die several times before you complete the first mission. We did…

Rather than try to deal with that helicopter yourself, simply get your men to shoot it down.

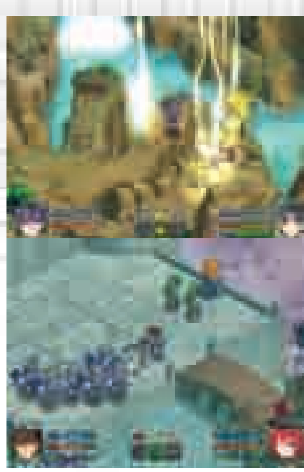
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

SHINING TEARS

SEGA CRIES OVER SPILT GAMEPLAY

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Nextech
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



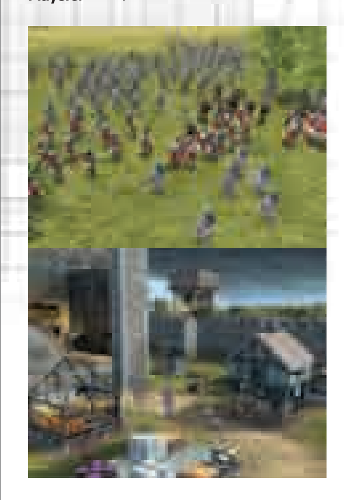
The *Shining Force* series has always been held in great esteem by RPG fanatics, but for us the game hasn't received the respect it deserves on current consoles. Hopefully, Sega and Nextech will be able to change all that with the PS2 release of *Shining Tears*, a game that tells much of the side-story from the *Shining Force* saga. Shifting away from the familiar strategy-RPG gameplay of previous games in the series, *Shining Tears* offers real-time action and the ability to have two people play co-operatively as they explore the attractive 2D isometric environments and advance the storyline in a multitude of ways, leading to one of eight possible endings. Expect to see a hands-on preview in just a few months time.

RELEASE DATE: MARCH '05

STRONGHOLD 2

BIGGER, BETTER, STRONGER

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Take 2 Interactive
Developer: Firefly Studios
Genre: RTS
Players: 1



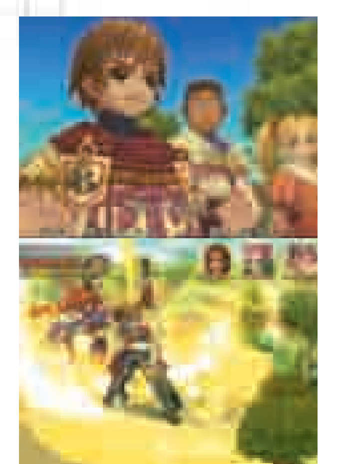
With both *Stronghold* and *Stronghold: Crusader* proving extremely popular with RTS fans, the announcement that a fully fledged sequel is in the works will no doubt come as welcome news. Not surprisingly, much has changed since the original game – specifically, the game's move into full 3D using an engine that's taken nearly two years to develop, and the addition of advanced facial animations. Plenty of work has also gone into the game's structure with resource management and pageantry seeing marked improvements, as well as the introduction of problems such as disease and criminal behaviour. Provided this lives up to the quality of the original games, it could well win more awards for Firefly.

RELEASE DATE: Q2 '05

RADIATA STORIES

KEEPING YOU WARM ALL YEAR LONG

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Tri-Ace
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



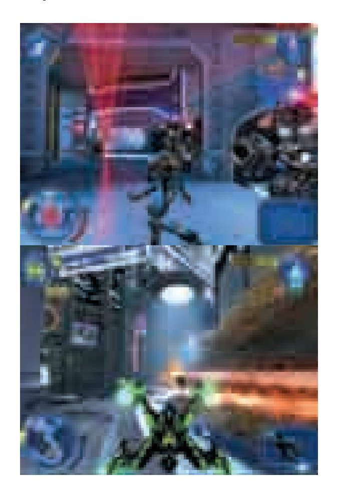
Best known for the *Star Ocean* series, developer Tri-Ace has already admitted that it's trying to do something different with *Radiata Stories*. Perhaps the biggest difference is that the game breaks the rules of many RPGs by having a world that's more interactive than most – day turns to night, NPCs go about their business and everything generally reacts depending on what time it is. There are also over 300 characters in the game, half of which can be convinced to join your party and therefore be used in battle (all of which happens in real-time, aside from a few special features). As if that doesn't sound different enough, Tri-Ace promises there'll a whole lot more when the game arrives in Japan early next year.

RELEASE DATE: TBA (Jap: 2005)

SCRAPLAND

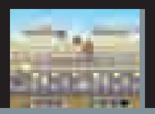
ANY OLD IRON, ANY OLD IRON

Format: Xbox, PC
Origin: Spain
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Mercury Steam
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



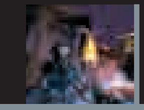
For the first game from a small developer, *Scrapland* is awfully ambitious. True, the story doesn't sound too remarkable (as a newcomer to the futuristic world of Scrapland your routine task of investigating a string of murders soon turns into something far more conspiratorial), but it's the amount of things that the game proposes that seems overwhelming. Not only do you have complete freedom of the game world with the ability to do whatever you please (much like the gameplay of *GTA*), but you can customise vehicles, switch between 15 different character types to acquire new abilities, and even revel in multiplayer racing and combat modes. See? We told you it was ambitious.

RELEASE DATE: JAN '05



Delayed – Mario Party Advance [GBA]

■ Despite no official confirmation from Nintendo, company insiders tell us that the handheld version of the *Mario Party* series has been knocked back from December into early next year.



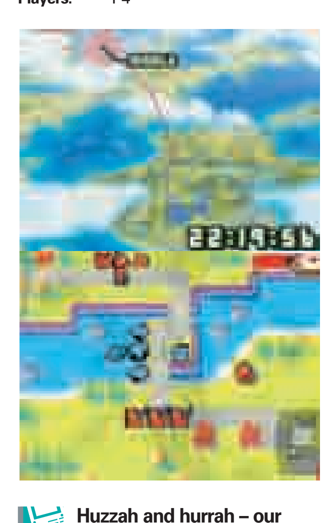
Resurrected – Duke Nukem Forever [PC]

■ Having recently chosen up-and-coming middleware firm Meqon to provide the game's physics, it looks like 3D Realms might actually get *Duke Nukem Forever* out before the next millennium. Good Lord.

ADVANCE WARS DS

TANKS AND GUNS AND BOMBS… OH MY

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-4



Huzzah and hurrah – our faith in the *Advance Wars* licence has been restored. While Kuju is busy turning our favourite handheld strategy game into a 3D real-time action nightmare (and until it proves otherwise, we'll keep thinking that), the thought of playing it on the DS instead makes us happy. Visually things haven't changed much (bar a touch of 3D on the map display) so it's the dual screens that add something new instead. The action now takes place on the top screen, complete with new battle sequences, missile strikes and even satellite attacks, while the lower touch screen allows you to command your troops with a wave of the stylus. If this hasn't got you ordering a DS already, you're clearly dead inside.

RELEASE DATE: TBA (US:Q1 '05)

SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE

'MAGIC SPELL IS EI-EI-POO'

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Amusement Vision
Genre: Action Puzzler
Players: 1-4





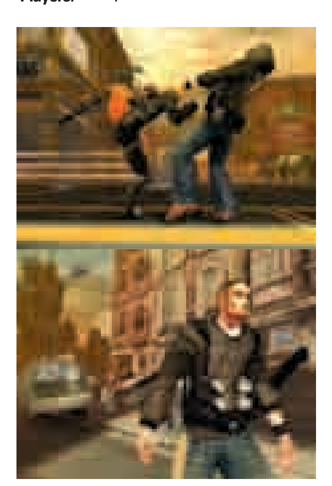
GameCube owners can grumble all they want about their loss, but we're pleased to see our favourite monkey-rolling puzzler heading to other consoles. Sega has upped the ante somewhat with this 'deluxe' version of *Super Monkey Ball* by making it the definitive package; not only does it feature 300 levels (114 from the original game, 140 from the sequel and 46 brand new stages) as well as all 12 multiplayer mini-games from both versions, but the Story mode has been tweaked to include additional stages while the three difficulty settings have all been merged into one fluid curve. It might not add much to the series but if it brings monkeys in balls to a wider audience, we're not complaining.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '05

GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

GET UP, GET ON THE SCENE

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: US
Publisher: Atari
Developer: The Collective
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1



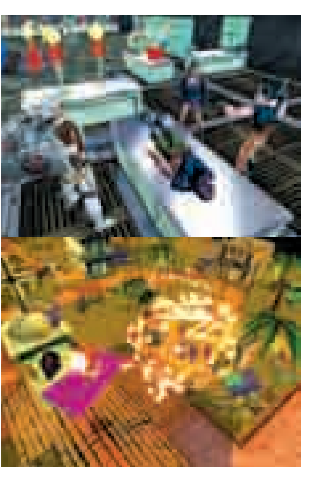
Get in, get up and get out – that's the message that Atari's graffiti-based title is attempting to deliver with its gameplay that will, according to developer The Collective, create a genre all of its own. Unfortunately, the concept sounds somewhat like a middle-aged dad trying to relate to the 'kidz on the street', set as it is in the urban jungle of New Radius with you as Trane, a rebel out to earn street cred through the self-expression of graffiti. With its mixture of multiple styles, though (stealth for when you have to sneak into a building, combat when you get caught or come up against a rival gang, and general action/adventure otherwise), it could just work if it doesn't try too hard to keep it real.

RELEASE DATE: JUNE '05

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE THIRD REICH

HOLY SUPERHERO SEQUELS, BATMAN

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Digital Jesters
Developer: Irrational Games
Genre: Tactical RPG
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



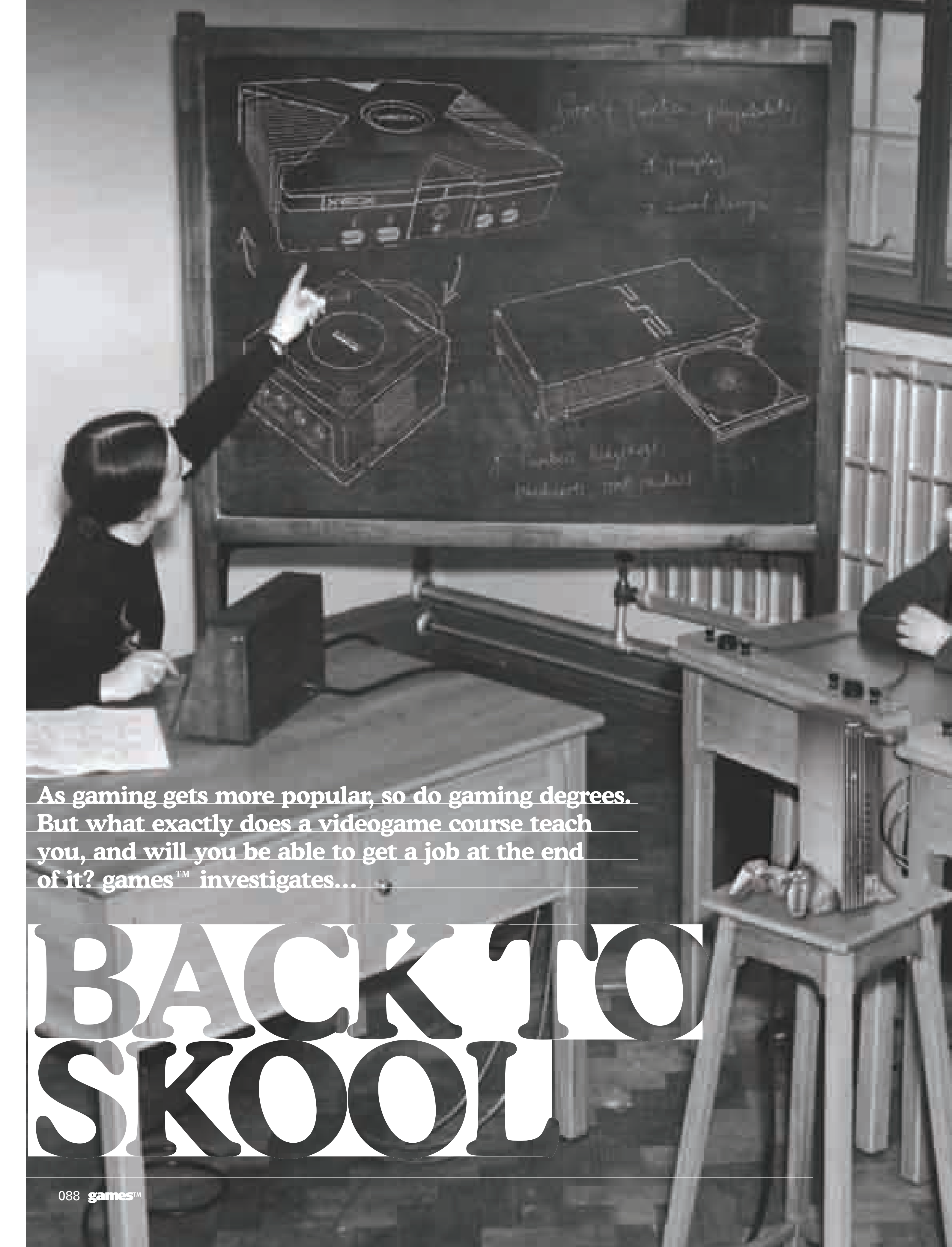
It's typical – you wait ages for a decent superhero game and then two come along at once. If the MMORPG goodness of *City Of Heroes* doesn't take your fancy then the long-awaited sequel to *Freedom Force* could be right up your criminal-infested alley instead. Despite implementing a number of technical improvements over the original game (including the introduction of a brand new 3D engine and massively enhanced visual detail), the game still retains much of the tactical RPG action seen before and offers the option for both single- and multiplayer action, all moulded around the comic-book style of the Sixties. Digital Jesters is on publishing duty and, hopefully, we'll be digging deeper into our spandex next issue.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '05



Beware the green sumo warrior **Bruce Lee Amstrad [US Gold] 1984**





BACK TO SKOOL

As gaming gets more popular, so do gaming degrees. But what exactly does a videogame course teach you, and will you be able to get a job at the end of it? games™ investigates…



Videogaming is a booming business. Where once upon a time simple games stored on cassettes could be made by one person and go on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies, technological advances, increasing sales and heightened consumer demand for ever more complex gaming experiences has formulated a new industry, one where large teams of coders, designers, developers, sound engineers and artists are required to create the next videogame blockbusters.

To satisfy a demand for talented individuals in this increasingly complicated field of work, a growing number of universities are now offering degree courses designed to teach specific skills necessary for videogame development. It's a nice idea, sure, but how much is known about these courses and how seriously should we take them? And, more importantly, how highly does the industry regard them and do they actually get graduates employed?

Learn the ropes

The first videogame course appeared at the University of Abertay Dundee in 1997, set up by John Sutherland, a reader in arts and media at the university. Sutherland himself admits his doing so was purely because the need for the courses was there – games were advancing but degrees weren't giving people the necessary skills. "I originally wrote the videogames degrees because the industry asked for them, because the videogames world had gone 3D and [computer science] degrees were not in this field," Sutherland explains.

But why Abertay? Why was a university deep inside Scotland the first to introduce such a course? It could have happened anywhere but Abertay is typical of an establishment needing to find ways of attracting more students, and setting up a videogames course was an ingenious way to persuade school-leavers to attend a university they wouldn't have otherwise considered. "Universities are driven by intake of students," says Sutherland. "Most of their funding comes from 'bums on seats'. If you can persuade a 17-year-old to take your course, your job is safe. This is why traditional degree programmes like chemistry, physics and maths are dying. They are tough to do and less sexy than media studies or videogames."

cont.

BACK TO SKOOL

cont.

If that makes it sound like videogame degrees are 'Mickey Mouse' courses, then the apparent lack of qualified teaching staff will do little to change this view. One of the major problems Abertay's course (and others) have had to contend with is the difficulty in finding expert tutors. A university lecturer will earn around £33,000 a year – a senior lecturer £43,000 – which is much less than anyone of the high standard required to teach these courses could earn working in the industry itself. Given the bleak outlook thus far, it's hardly surprising some development companies don't take these courses seriously, preferring their new recruits to have either practical experience or a more traditional degree, such as computer science or physics.

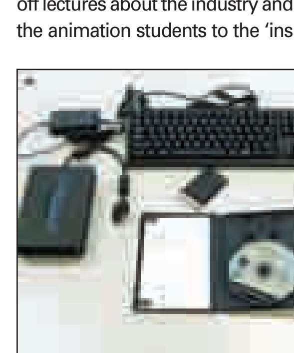
One key problem may be that these courses currently lack accreditation and, as such, are widely misunderstood and distrusted by much of the development community, and even potential students. Jon Ritman, a veteran developer responsible for old-school classics like *Match Day* and who still works within the industry, is one of the game-degree sceptics. "I'd rather hire someone with a good maths degree who has also made demos or games in their own time," he says. "In the end I need people who can program and have a very good understanding of maths."

Earning respect

Despite such widespread negativity there are companies who feel differently about these courses. Climax, the Portsmouth-based studio responsible for *Sudeki* and *MotoGP*, is keen to support videogame courses and even set up a module on game development for Portsmouth University. "Back in 1999 we were invited to give one-off lectures about the industry and introduce the animation students to the 'ins and outs' of actual game development," explains James Brace, art director for Climax. "From then on the lectures became more regular. [Eventually] through a mutual agreement we were asked to create a brief for one of the modules on the BA course – a game development brief that would introduce the students to the work ethics and trials that would be tested in the industry."

While it's heartening to see developers take an interest and help out with videogames education, the motivation is rather self-serving. It's to Climax's benefit if the students can be taught key abilities and techniques ahead of time, saving Climax the chore of having to bring new recruits up to speed itself. "We wished that there was a dedicated games course that would really help people develop the basic games development skills before they start a job in the industry," Brace explains. "We can spend up to six months training someone, but if they already had that experience on a games course they would have a much greater advantage over other applicants."

However, despite developer support, it's clear the field of videogame education needs accreditation if it is ever to be taken seriously by the industry as a whole. And thankfully, according to the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (Elspa), this is on its way to taking place. "The industry, through its sector skills body, SkillSet, is in the process of setting up an accreditation scheme for degree courses relevant to the computer games sector," says Michael Rawlinson, deputy director general of Elspa. "SkillSet has already created a skills map for development, and together with the industry will be fleshing out the specific requirements for each skills area. Once this has been completed the universities themselves will be brought into the picture to complete the scheme.







choosing the right path

SO MANY COURSES, SO MANY CAREERS – WHICH ONE'S RIGHT FOR YOU?

The first problem facing any aspiring game developer is figuring out what to specialise in. There's the option of becoming an artist, programmer, sound engineer or, as most people aspire to, games designer. The latter requires the least technical expertise and, as such, is the most fiercely fought for. Justin Starck – like many – is fairly distrustful of specific 'designer' courses. "Personally, I'm not sure of the value of some of the 'games designer' courses that have popped up," he explains. "I don't believe any serious company will employ you initially as one." For those who can specialise in a specific area, it's advisable to find a course that focuses on this – be a programmer or artist first and bag a designer job later once you're proven in your field. If you can't draw or code, then after graduation Q&A testing is the route to take. This can often lead to designer positions for quality graduates.

It's hoped the process will be completed in time for the academic year starting in the autumn of 2005."

Making progress

Given the scepticism displayed by certain developers towards videogame courses, what do the students actually get up to? What equipment do they use? And are the skills they acquire as advanced as what will be expected from them in a development house? Speaking to videogames graduates reveals that almost all of them have had to put up with someone suggesting their chosen path of study was some kind of easy ride to a degree. However, as these students are quick to tell you, it's tougher than that.

Justin Starck studied on Abertay's BSc computer games technology course and is now working as a developer for Team Based Learning Dynamics, producing game-based training products. "I can honestly say I know of no other course which demanded the same hours as we put it," he says. "It's one of the reasons I get angry when you tell someone you're doing a games degree and they seem to think you sit around playing games all day." According to Starck, the hours put in by students were not typical of a 'work-dodge' degree. "It was quite usual for people to be working very late. A common question was 'are you doing an all-nighter tonight?' I'd often find myself working from about 8:30am one day until the early hours of the following morning."

Considering the amount of time students spend putting their skills to practical effect in labs, it's safe to assume there's a lot to do. "The course covered console and PC coding," says Starck. "Subjects were taught as modules and a programming module would normally consist of one-third theory and two-thirds practical work. I personally struggled with some of the aspects of my course – the maths and physics are some of the hardest studied in Britain."



"I'd rather hire someone with a good maths degree who has also made demos or games in their own time – in the end I need people who can program and have a very good understanding of maths" – Jon Ritman





The Net Yaroze and a Linux-enabled PlayStation2 are just a few of the industry tools used by undergraduates.



getting noticed

YOU'VE FOUND THE COURSE OR JOB YOU WANT, SO WHAT NOW?

One of the key ways of both getting into a course and attaining employment is getting yourself noticed. But this goes further than simply being talented – employers see talented people every day. It's all about how you sell yourself, and this comes down to your CV and portfolio. Employers will see many CVs so candidates need to make theirs special. This goes beyond pretty, clear and condensed presentation. Employers are looking for special abilities and extra curricular experience that set one candidate apart form the crowd. Jawad Ahmed and his team won the Rare Technical Excellence prize in Abertay University's Dare To Be Digital competition and he firmly believes this extra selling point (and his experience in building a 3D graphics library for the PS2) complemented his course and aided him in getting his job at EA. "The course provided the knowledge and the competition provided the contact [with sponsors EA] and the chance to use the knowledge gained," Ahmed explains.

Practical work was facilitated by Sony hardware, which included both the Net Yaroze (an original PlayStation enabled with development capabilities) and a Linux kit for the PlayStation2, which when combined with a hard drive gives the console powerful development capabilities. "We used Yarozes which had been donated by Sony for two modules in the second or third years of the course," explains Starck, "Last year Sony donated more equipment including PlayStation2 Linux kits, so console programming is now done on this more up-to-date platform." Another advantage to using PS2 Linux kits is the potential for creating network-based games – a highly useful tool considering the direction gaming is moving towards. In his article, 'PlayStation2 in higher education (so you want to be a games programmer?)', Abertay games lecturer Henry Fortuna says that the Linux-enabled PS2 is a boon for students – "Using the kit it is possible for students to design and create network-enabled computer games which have global access through the internet."

Foot in the door

Given the content of certain games courses and the effort put into them, it seems odd that there are still developers who only want to hire people with lots of experience or more traditional degrees simply because



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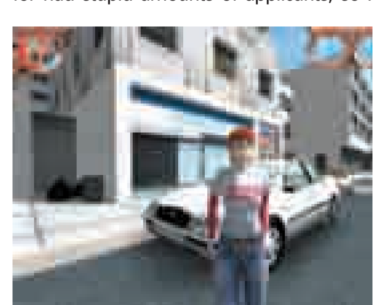
they don't know exactly what goes on in these 'new-fangled' videogame courses. As Alan Stock, a graduate of the Salford computer and videogames course and now a junior games designer for BigBig Studios points out, "Not many games companies know anything about these courses, so it's up to you to explain to them what skills you've learned and what experience you've gained."

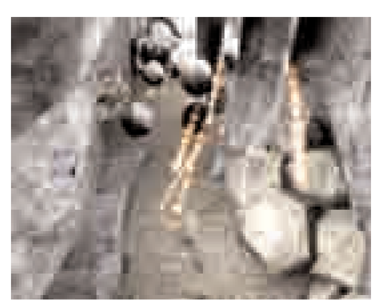
We spoke to many graduates who have found jobs because of the skills garnered from the game-centric courses they've done, proving that with the right approach it's possible to show companies that you're worth employing. Climax's recruitment manager, Stuart Godfrey, says that his studio looks for a range of qualities in potential employees. "First and foremost [you need] a technical or creative excellence closely followed by a passion for videogames," Godfrey explains. "A belief in yourself is also an excellent quality – many candidates apply and if that doesn't result in an interview they give up and move on. A high level of determination will be key in you getting a role in the industry."

Alan Stock backs up this point, having found how hard it can be to break into the industry and how perseverance is the only way to succeed. "It took me from November 2003 until June 2004 to get a job in design," he says. "Even with about nine or ten interviews I always lost out to more experienced designers. Every job I applied for had stupid amounts of applicants, so I was just happy to even get interviews. Fortunately, I eventually got lucky after a lot of perseverance and hard work, so it is possible." And this was lucky, especially when you consider the job of a games designer is one of the most difficult to obtain – everyone wants to do it. Generally, people get into this off the back of another talent such as programming or they start out Q&A testing and work their way up.

That said, as Stock has proved, it can be done if a person has the necessary savvy and determination to work out what will press the right buttons with the studio. First off, it's worth noting that the whole 'where did you school?' hiring policy found in other industries is non-existent here. As Stuart Godfrey points out, it's the person that matters: "[Climax] has no bias – quality and talent speak for themselves. We've had applicants from some of the lesser 'known' universities whose work has been outstanding, and applicants from the more recognised universities whose work has been quite average. It's all down to the individual candidate and what they are able to show us in terms of demos or portfolios."

And there's the key word: portfolio. This – regardless of background – is the single most important aid for employers to sort the talent from those who are simply trying to blag their way in. If a candidate can demonstrate that they are full of ideas and have natural talent within their chosen field, they will be hired. The only thing standing in their way is the time it'll take them to get up





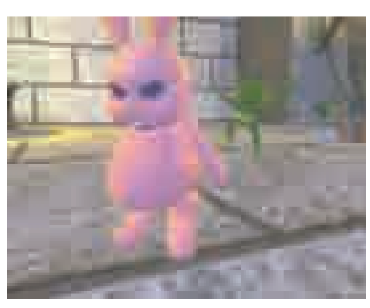
Paradise Fall was developed by undergraduates at Salford University in order to put their theoretical skills into practice.

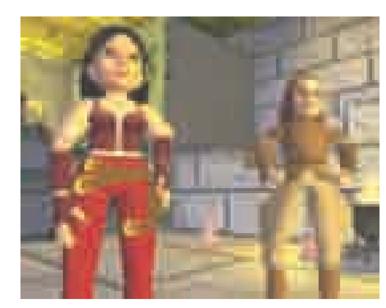
game for a laugh

A GAMING DEGREE CAN GET YOU THAT VITAL HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

All videogame courses will at some point require practical, hands-on work where students get to test their growing abilities. Mostly, this will come in the form of a project involving game production. Alan Stock and his team, Japan Cat, produced a game called *Paradise Fall*, a survival-esque adventure game using the *Quake 3* engine where players control Rachel, a girl stranded on an island full of puzzles and monsters. To see more of this game visit the team's website at www.japancat.co.uk.

"Even with about nine or ten interviews I always lost out to more experienced designers. Every job I applied for had stupid amounts of applicants, so I was just happy to even get interviews. I eventually got lucky after a lot of perseverance and hard work" – Alan Stock





Just Add Water helped a team of Abertay undergraduates scoop a prize at the Dare To Be Digital awards.

to speed with the specific workings of that studio, compared with the time the developer has to complete the project the applicant would be working on. "The experience of the candidate is purely down to the time scale that the project allows," explains Godfrey. "Most graduates, be it creative or technical, will require elements of training and training can take up valuable time on a short project. On many occasions a talented individual has approached Climax and although at the time we had no suitable positions we have kept in contact with the individual until such time we do have a position available." This may come as surprise to most, considering companies in all industries are famous for using the 'we'll keep you on file' line simply to soften the blow for rejected applicants. The message here is clear, if you have the talent, Climax doesn't want you to slip through its fingers.

And this is a view that's starting to spread – companies such as EA and Microsoft are investing time and money into activities purely so they can monitor new talent (like the Dare To Be Digital competition, see the 'Opportunity Knocks' boxout). Jawad Ahmed – a graduate of Abertay's computer games technology course, co-winner of Dare To Be Digital's Rare Technical Excellence prize and now a student tools programmer for EA – is one of many to see the benefits of EA's talent-spotting drive. The combination of the Technical Excellence prize and his bulging portfolio bagged him a job at one of the world's most famous and successful development and publishing companies straight from university. "Ten of us applied and we all went down to EA's Chertsey studio for an interview, which involved a one-hour coding test and a 30-minute one to one," he says. "From that ten, three of us were invited back, which was a hardcore two-and-a-half hour interview. After that I found out I was accepted. The knowledge I had gained on the PS2 from my [honours] project [Ahmed designed a 3D graphics library for the PS2] was definitely something that impressed EA interviewers as this was knowledge that is not expected from a graduate."

The new path

Despite the scepticism regarding videogame courses, there is immense scope for talented people with the drive and ambition to succeed. Considering the recent closures of UK development studios and the fact that for Abertay's course there are hundreds of applicants for only 65-70 places, videogaming is a tough, competitive industry both in and out of the classroom.

There's little doubting the worth and potential of these courses, and with accreditation on the cards, and employed graduates championing the courses that moulded them, it's only a matter of time before the old-fashioned views fade away and videogame courses are the main – and perhaps eventually the 'traditional' – way to enter videogame development. Right now, though, for students it's all about making the course their own and using it to build an impressive portfolio suitably demonstrating their ability. "I saw doing a games course as a portfolio and skills-building exercise," Alan Stock explains. "Use the tools you've been provided with and make some good portfolio stuff." It worked for him, and, put simply, for graduates who have the required talent, it'll work for them too.

the end



opportunity knocks

HOW EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Held annually at the University of Abertay Dundee is the Dare To Be Digital competition. Here teams of students produce game prototypes over a ten-week period in the hope of winning cash prizes. This not only acts as a chance for students to put their skills into practice, but – for the successful at least – may even boost their chances of getting employed. Any number of student teams put in applications each year, but for the final development stage they're whittled down to six teams who, over the development period, are given a budget of £200 and a 'wage' of £170 each per week to make the process easier. When the time is up the teams must present their prototypes to a panel of judges made up of sponsors (including representatives from such big-name companies as Rare, Microsoft and EA) who are tasked with handing out the awards to the most impressive entrants. An award from this competition is an ideal extra for a graduate's CV.


Get yourself online and fight to the death – it's all about the vengeance this time
Tribes: Vengeance 100



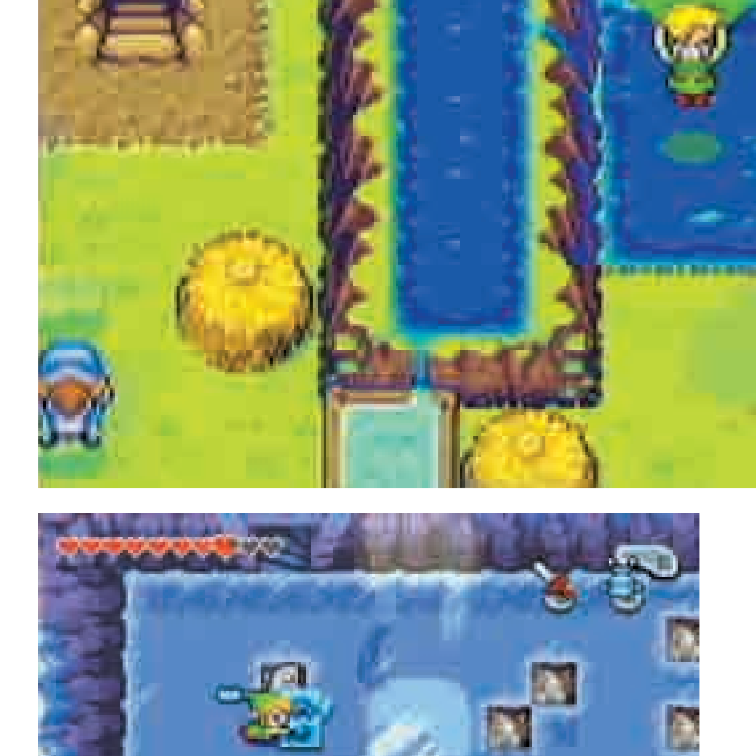
REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, games™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



The Minish can be found everywhere – you just need to know where to look. And even when you do know, there's the small (ahem) matter of working out how to shrink yourself down in the right places…



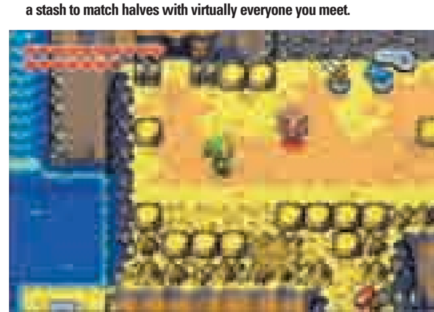


Like a Kinder Egg, but made of bread rather than chocolate – you never know what you'll find inside.

The puzzles might look the same but they'll still take some solving, even for dedicated *Zelda* players.



Fusing Kinstones might be tricky at first, but you'll soon have enough of a stash to match halves with virtually everyone you meet.



You caught a Joy Butterfly! You can now dig faster than before!

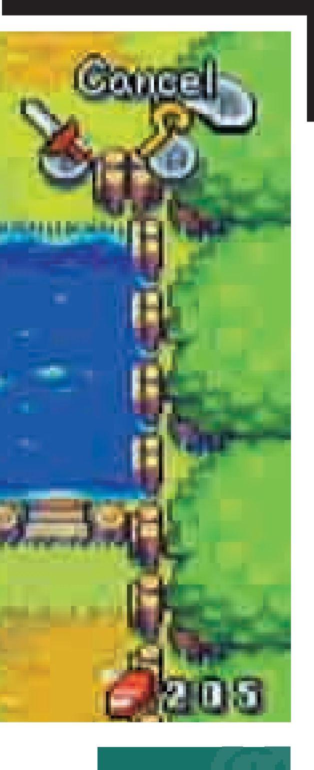
A side-quest within a side-quest – Joy Butterflies take some work to find.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SIGHT AND SOUND: *Minish Cap* is by far the most attractive *Zelda* game on a handheld.

THE LITTLE THINGS: Capcom has tweaked many small things that change the gameplay for the better.



A TRUE 'ONE SIZE FITS ALL' ADVENTURE

LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Capcom

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
15 November

PLAYERS
1

Some might say it's quite a risk for Nintendo that its biggest GBA release this Christmas (and the continuation of one of its most valued franchises) hasn't been developed internally. That isn't to say it doesn't know what it's doing, but having received less attention than the company's other upcoming titles from the press, public and even Nintendo's own advertising department, *The Minish Cap* is hitting the shelves as something of an unknown quantity. As Capcom's third attempt at a *Zelda* title, though (fourth, if you include *Four Swords* on the GBA port of *Link To The Past*), considerable work has gone into proving that Nintendo farming out one of its prized titles wasn't a mistake. And it shows, with every inch of *Minish Cap* radiating the kind of meticulous care and attention that only a labour of love ever receives.

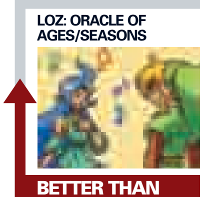
Admittedly, one thing Capcom hasn't paid too much attention to while crafting the story behind *The Minish Cap* (and a fine story it is too) is the hallowed *Zelda* history book that every fan of the series keeps safely under their pillow. Just as previous handheld efforts like *Link's Awakening* and the *Oracle* games took us to new lands, so *Minish Cap* also stands out as an oddity by attempting to reinvent Hyrule, while giving the fans enough sly winks and subtle sardonic humour to assure them we're not a million miles away from the territory they've explored so many times before. Perhaps a few thousand, yes, but certainly not a million.

The changes are most evident in the plot, simply because it attempts to shoehorn an entirely new tribe – the Minish – into *Zelda* mythology. Yes, the Minish (or Picori) were responsible for giving Hyrule the Master Sword. No, it wasn't the great Goddesses of the Sky as we used to think. No, it's not called the Master Sword any more. Yes, it's only because the Minish are so small that no-one's noticed them before… and so on. The villain of the piece is even the evil sorcerer Vaati – a name that should ring a few bells for anyone who's played through *Four Swords* on the GBA or GameCube. Between Vaati trying to steal the Light Force (yes, Light, not Tri), Link trying to reforge the Picori Blade and more new areas in Hyrule than there are recognisable ones, it's enough to have *Zelda* purists up in arms. And yet it all creates one of the most absorbing and thought-provoking games in the series for a long time.

Although the reasons for this are plentiful, it comes down to a single, almost unfathomable idea – that someone, other than Nintendo, has succeeded in injecting a *Zelda* game with that undefinable magic that makes *Zelda* titles such a joy to play. And that magic manages to seep into every part of the game. Certainly in a graphical

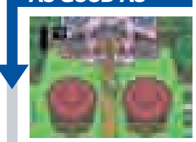
"JUST AS THE SURFACE HAS BEEN POLISHED, SO TOO HAS THE GAMEPLAY, AND FOR THIS CAPCOM SHOULD BE CONGRATULATED"

LOZ: ORACLE OF AGES/SEASONS



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



LOZ: LINK TO THE PAST



This man gave us nightmares in *Wind Waker*… and now he's back. Damn his eyes.

NOT YOU AGAIN…

Wind Waker **completists, beware – if you thought you'd seen enough sculpted figurines to last you a lifetime, *Minish Cap* has a nasty surprise up its sleeve for you. Collecting Mysterious Shells from around the land earns you the right to visit to the sculptor who lives in Hyrule Town (yes, the same one from *Wind Waker*), who will exchange them for a go on his figurine-dispensing machine. Each turn rewards you with one of the 130 different models available, but the more you collect, the lower your chances are of getting one you haven't already won – the only way to raise them again is to trade in even more Shells. Considering we've finished the game and we're not even close to getting a complete set, we suspect you'll be here for a while.**

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

NEXT OF KIN: The option to fuse Kinstones means you can tailor side-quests as you wish.

LATEST KIT: *Minish Cap* has new items that are significantly different from anything seen before.

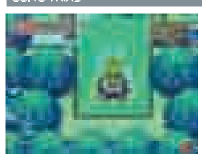
sense, for instance, Hyrule has never looked better on a handheld – indeed, it surpasses virtually everything that even the GameCube version of *Four Swords* achieved. Presenting Hyrule as a verdant land full of colour and life, the attention to detail really makes the place come alive – the tiniest animations, even though they may seem unimportant, give the game character and show that Capcom has put a lot of thought into how it wanted everything to look. Similarly, the sound quality has been improved to the point that it sounds almost too good for a GBA. The music changes depending on where you are and the game even borrows effects from *Ocarina Of Time*, from the noises that people make when you talk to them, to Link's cries as he works his sword.

Just as the surface has been polished, so too has the gameplay, and for this Capcom should be congratulated. It's the brave move of making major changes to Link's inventory that makes *Minish Cap* so enjoyable, if only because it brings back that spark that made *Zelda* so special in the first place. Had *Minish Cap* stuck with the same old items and weapons (the Hook Shot, the Hammer, the Fire Rod and so on), gamers familiar with the series would have had no trouble racing through the puzzles. However, by introducing new items, Capcom has recreated the sense of mystery that compels you to see what's next. When you finally discover an item that allows you to overcome a

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

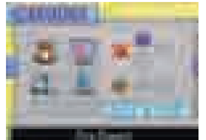
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

00:10 mins



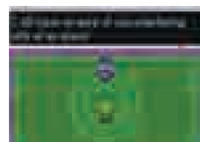
With the story set-up out of the way, it's off to the Minish Forest you go. After a little exploration the Minish Cap will be safely on your head. Suits you, sir.

02:00 HOURS



You should have reclaimed at least one of the four elements needed to repair your sword, or maybe even two if you're ignoring all the side-quests that are offered.

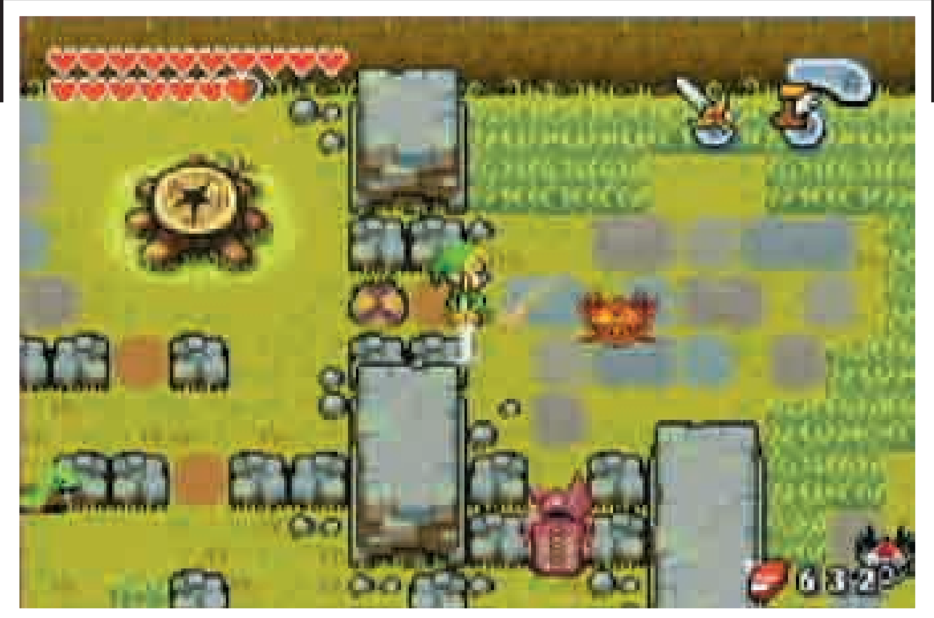
3 DAYS



Undoubtedly, you'll have reached the end of the main quest, but with so many Kinstones and figurines to find, we suspect there'll still be plenty of work to do.



When Link is Minish-sized, he can talk to animals – and even animals love Kinstones. Really.



"CAPCOM HAS MANAGED TO BRING BACK FEELINGS WE HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED SINCE THE FIRST TIME WE WENT ADVENTURING WITH LINK"

dead end, the satisfaction is that much greater. Not only that, but it also means that there are a good few puzzles that'll have you thinking for a while, thus extending the life of the game.

However, there's always been a very fine line between longevity and laboriousness when it comes to adventure games of this sort and it's a line that *Minish Cap* walks precariously, occasionally threatening to leap onto the side of tedium. How you regard this depends on what you expect from your *Zelda* games; we recall many people berating *Wind Waker* for its drawn-out sailing sections that required the player to go back and forth, even though we saw nothing wrong with them (being, as it was, a game set predominantly on water). That said, at least Capcom has learnt a few lessons from the *Oracle* games that have stood it in good stead when creating the extensive side-quests found in *Minish Cap*.

Whereas the need to collect Rings in the *Oracle* adventures soon became a chore that didn't really add to the gameplay, the desire to collect and then fuse Kinstones with the inhabitants of Hyrule is one that can change the adventure entirely. The laborious part comes in finding Kinstones to begin with – rarer pieces are hidden in chests, while others can be found randomly in grass or under rocks, meaning you have to look everywhere as you travel around. It's the fusing of the Kinstones, however, that makes the difference; each one causes an event somewhere else on the map (be it revealing a chest, opening a hidden chamber, creating a Rupee-heavy monster and so on), allowing you to then pursue that additional task if you wish. The more you fuse, the more side-quests you'll earn and the more you'll want to fuse with other people, particularly as there are a hundred fusions to find before your job is done.

That said, the one criticism we could level at *Minish Cap* is that the core adventure is a little short. Admittedly, this may just be because games like *Ocarina Of Time* have spoilt us; six dungeons is still a significant figure, particularly as the game has been toughened up thanks to some subtle tweaks. As short as it may prove for some players, though, there's no denying that it's not a joy to play regardless of whether you're a newcomer to the series or a veteran. In creating the *Minish Cap*, Capcom has managed to bring back feelings we haven't experienced since the first time we went adventuring with Link; considering those are the feelings that made us love *Zelda* in the first place, that can only be a good thing.



Capcom has added the *Four Swords* ability to the adventure, although it doesn't play nearly as big a role as in the game of the same title.



New items abound in *Minish Cap*, many of which can help you get past those dead ends that you just couldn't fathom.



TRAIN TO WIN

Taking a leaf out of *Wind Waker*'s book, *Minish Cap* uses various training sessions to increase Link's repertoire of moves rather than just dishing them out at random intervals. By visiting one of the many sword trainers dotted around the land, Link can earn special Tiger Scrolls that grant him new powers; some, like the Spin Attack, are old favourites while others, like the Rock Breaker or the Peril Beam, are interesting innovations that can help you out in a pinch. If you can learn all seven techniques you can call yourself a Sword Master, although there's a sword-wielding voice from beyond the grave who can probably still teach you a thing or two…

FAQs

Q: A BIT SHORT?
The game looks that way at first thanks to a relatively small map, but there's so much crammed into it that you'll be impressed with how much there is to do.

Q: DIFFICULT?
The *Zelda* hardcore might only scratch their heads a couple of times at the puzzles, but it's the other things – more damaging enemies, less leniency on health and so on – that make this particularly challenging.

Q: BEST NEW ITEM?
Besides the Minish Cap itself? Probably the Mole Mitts – the essential part of any underground expedition.



VERDICT 9/10

BLISSFULLY ENJOYABLE FROM START TO FINISH

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Australia

PUBLISHER
Vivendi

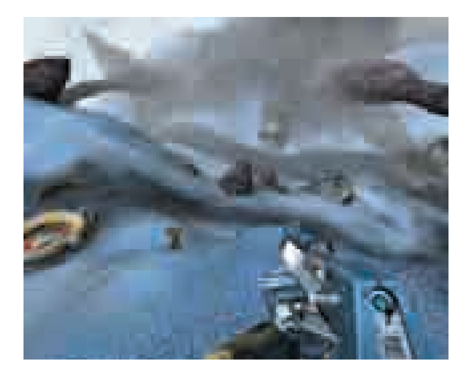
DEVELOPER
Irrational Games

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (1-32 Online)

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 98/2000/ME/XP, 3Gb HDD space, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D video card, Direct X-compatible sound card





TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A TRIBES GAME TO KEEP THE FRIENDLESS HAPPY

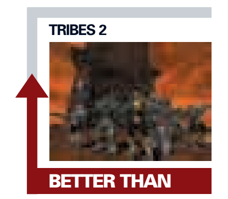
There's nothing nicer than settling down of an evening and taking on a gang of your mates – and undoubtedly a few strangers – in a fight to the death. As we've yet to find a way to do these sorts of things in real life without suffering serious consequences, this may explain the popularity of online FPS games, and among the most respected titles in this genre are the *Tribes* games. The two previous outings were both great multiplayer titles and now it's time for the third game, *Tribes: Vengeance*, to try its luck with an eager and critical following. The greatest element that sets this apart from the other *Tribes* titles is the attention to the single-player game. Whereas a single-player mode was absent from all the other *Tribes* games, the quality of the campaign this time is of such a high level that it would be easy to consider the online elements as nothing more than a bonus if you didn't know any better.

The tale is told in an interesting way – rather than following a progressive story told in a regular fashion, you'll skip around through time and play as six characters over two generations in order to learn snippets of the facts and gradually build up an understanding of what's going on.

As you flit between stories you'll take control of different characters.



TRIBES 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004





GAME, SET AND MATCH

Even as you play through the single-player missions you'll be given a taster of what the online modes are offering. A short way into the game you'll take control of an Imperial Princess who must lead her team to victory in a series of 'sporting' events that involve a few of the modes that you'll find in the multiplayer options. Fuel-stealing rounds, arena battles and one-on-one showdowns are all put on for the crowd's entertainment and you'll have to show some serious skill and make full use of your abilities if you want to come out on top. As with every other area of the game, you'll have to select what type of armour you want to don. The heavier armour will exchange speed for firepower and defence, so tactics are all important in these games.


There's plenty of explosive weaponry to make destroying your enemies more fun.

games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ALL BY MYSELF: The single-player campaign has seen much improvement since the last game.

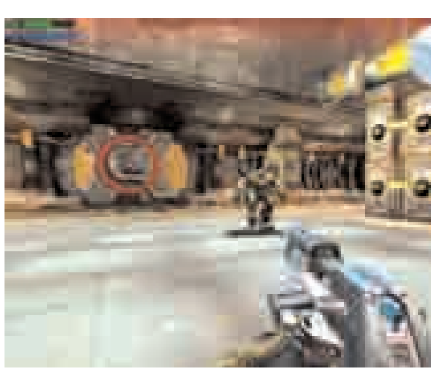
STORY TIME: The plot leaps about all over the place, leaving you guessing until the very end.

FAQs

Q. SO WHERE DOES THE STORY GO?
We wouldn't want to ruin it for you, but as the name suggests, it's all about revenge.

Q. PLENTY OF NEW WEAPONS?
A fair few, but many of the old ones have seen some improvements.

Q. THE MULTIPLAYER'S AS GOOD AS EVER?
As you'd expect, there's plenty here to keep you and your friends amused for quite a while.


As in the previous games you can choose how heavy your armour is – remember, though, the bigger they are the harder they fall.

For obvious reasons you can't play the same way with a heavily armoured Imperial Soldier as you would a defenceless little girl, so a change of play style is demanded with each level and new challenges will arise that give the game a varied pace that works extremely well and keeps you guessing as to what will be revealed next.

As good looking and enjoyable as the single-player romp is, there are a few frustrating areas that let the game down. You'll soon learn to despise the Grappling Hook tool as it needlessly drops you into a team of blaster-toting enemies for the eighth time, and multiplayer-wise, unless you're a seasoned pro, combining the art of skiing and flying is tricky to master and newcomers are bound to repeatedly fall at the hands of players who have already perfected the necessary skills.

Of course, the previous *Tribes* games have been all about the multiplayer experience, and even though its single-player campaign alone is worthy of the price tag, this is still an area in which *Tribes: Vengeance* will attract many fans. Those that have played any of the previous games online will feel right at home with the selection of modes and the familiar feel of the team-oriented-goals combat. But it wouldn't be much of a sequel without improvements so there are a few new elements (new vehicles and more devastating weaponry) that will help enhance the furious online battles.

True to form, the number of multiplayer modes is impressive. Player favourites such as the classic arena battles and the flag keep-away Rabbit mode are all included, and new game types such as Ball and Fuel help make this an extremely varied multiplayer experience. A Ball match will see your team trying to keep the ball away from the opposing team while trying to slam it into their goal; hardly an original concept, but it's made infinitely more exciting by the inclusion of weapons that could quite easily slice an elephant in half from a fair distance. The savage weaponry is a running theme throughout the multiplayer modes and in a Fuel game you'll use your armour and arsenal to steal fuel from your enemy's tank and carry it back to your own. Easy enough if it wasn't for the opposing team attempting to do the same to you.

Overall, the combat is as fluid as ever and there's nothing more satisfying than combining your ski and jetpack abilities to gracefully glide over an enemy's head and launch a grenade that robs him of his last wedge of health, forcing him to watch the rest of the match from the sidelines. Whether you're a fan of the series, an FPS lover or a gamer who likes nothing more than a good online scrap, *Tribes: Vengeance* should provide some long-lasting enjoyment.





Fill the Freak Out bar and your skateboarder will stomp through his skateboard in anger.



NEVERSOFT SKATES BACK IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, Cube, PC, GBA

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
NeverSoft

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8 (Online)

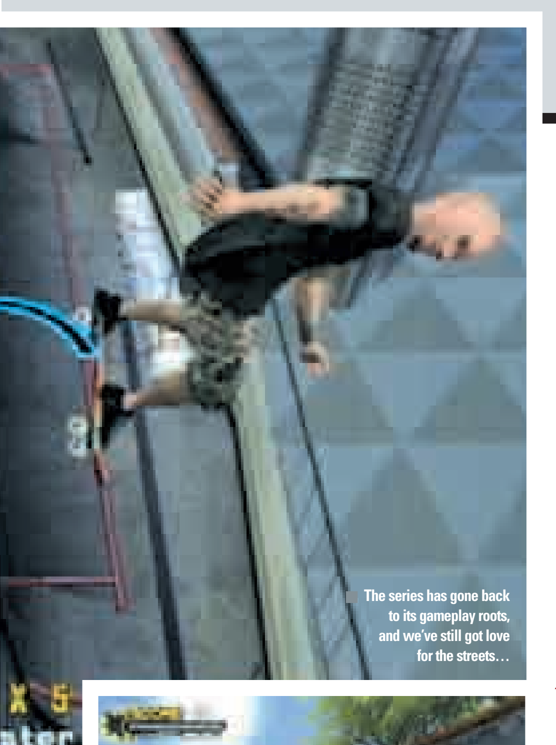
Instead of the step forward into a brave new world that Neversoft promised *Tony Hawk's Underground* was going to be, it turned out to be a sideways manoeuvre – a barely disguised *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5*. It was enjoyable, but that was due more to the combo system that's served the series so well over the years rather than the clumsy implementation of the new stealth and driving sections. Fortunately, Neversoft has found its voice again by shunning the grittiness and underground attitude that many other developers have plumped for; Neversoft has learnt to have fun again.

This is most evident in the vibrant MTV-style presentation of the menus, storyline and the game itself. *Jackass*'s Bam Margera leads one skateboarding team while Tony Hawk heads another, both competing on a World Destruction Tour where the aim is to cause anarchy in different cities. Where Bam treads, his *Jackass* bedfellows aren't too far behind so Wee Man, Steve-O, Phil Margera et al also pop up in various guises. It helps to have seen the TV show, but even so, it's obvious that the addition of these characters, who exist solely to cause mayhem, shows Neversoft is now playing this for kicks. Instead of trying to be cool and gritty, the World Destruction Tour is all



SOUND OF THE UNDERGROUND

***Tony Hawk's Underground 2* has a fantastic playlist, coming close to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* as the best licensed soundtrack in a sports game. It doesn't go for the same cult appeal as previous titles did, so instead of Motörhead and Public Enemy you now have Johnny Cash and the bouncing bassline of Sugarhill Gang's *Rapper's Delight*. It's an eclectic bunch of songs, certainly, but the vibrant nature of the game welds the upbeat tunes together into a great soundtrack. Normally soundtracks wouldn't merit a mention but Neversoft should get credit for avoiding the obvious American rock that plagues so many other similar titles.**


The series has gone back to its gameplay roots, and we've still got love for the streets…

FAQs

Q. CRAZY CHARACTERS?
Wee Man, Bam Margera and Steve-O are all here in playable form with their own tasks to complete.

Q. USELESS CHARACTERS?
Some have pretty lacklustre tasks, such as the aborigine in the mini-kart.

Q. SECRET CHARACTERS?
Yup, there are plenty of these, including a certain family-friendly fat green ogre…


THUG

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN


TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4





about having fun, and everything from the colour scheme (bright pastel colours replace the dour, lifeless greys) to the soundtrack (Frank Sinatra usurps The Clash) reflects this attitude.

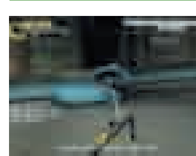
The idea of causing anarchy stretches beyond the storyline to the tasks. Some rely on the high-scoring mechanisms of old but the majority involve anything from scaring seagulls off an Australian beach to the more skilful crossing of a bridge in Barcelona without touching the ground. Pedestrians and tips accompanying task descriptions also eliminate time-wasting as you skate around trying to find what it is you're meant to trick off – instead you know where to go with a good idea of how to do it. While *Underground* tried to seamlessly mix its diversity, humour and gameplay, it was always obvious when you were being dragged away from the combo system at the heart of the series. Thankfully, *THUG 2* makes a much better fist of keeping classic *Tony Hawk's* gameplay at the heart of the tasks. Even when skating as Benjamin Franklin or a shrimp vendor, the focus remains on skateboarding.

The levels themselves are well designed and fairly distinctive, thanks to the matadors in Barcelona, gothic architecture in Germany and so on. Night passes into misty morning and on into day while skaters grind around the levels and flip off ramps. These atmospheric additions aren't huge, but in a genre where they're not even necessary it's an appreciated touch that breathes life into each location. The levels don't feel as big as those found in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* but they make better use of the smaller space, with combo lines being well hidden until you set off on an initial grind and then multiple combo opportunities reveal themselves. Using all the series's moves together with this compact design, it's not too hard to combo from one end of the level to another. Series veterans could probably even make it back again…

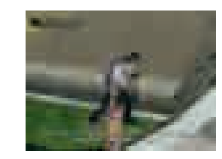
And that's the secret of *THUG 2*'s success – the ability to work exhibition combos and high-score chasing into a structure that accommodates less skilled gamers. The additions to the gameplay aren't quite as successful, if only because Neversoft is running out of ideas in that department, yet this feels new because the developer has a lot more confidence in the direction it's taking the *Tony Hawk* series. The main game isn't as long as previous titles, but it's more fun due to the leniency and variety of the tasks. Perhaps the best indication that Neversoft has paid attention to complaints that the tasks in *THUG* diluted the gameplay is the addition of Classic mode, stripping away the tasks and sticking to the 'collect S-K-A-T-E' ethos of old. This will satisfy both groups of *Tony Hawk's* gamers, and if you're not sure which camp you fall into, consider this two games for the price of one.



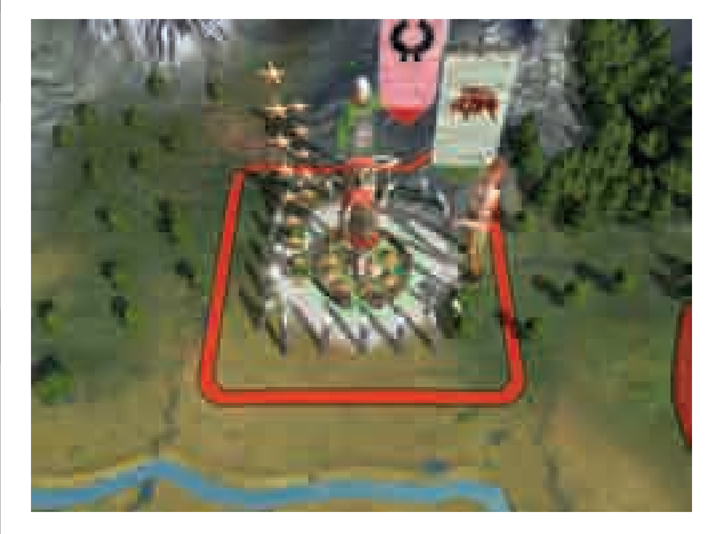
XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW


The biggest difference between this and the PS2 version is in the joypads. After years honing the controls to suit a DualShock2, *THUG* feels awkward with an Xbox pad.

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW


Same complaints as the Xbox version with regards to the pad but it also misses out on all the online options, meaning this is the worst of the multiformat choices.







To save time, naval battles are resolved automatically.



APPARENTLY, IT WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY. WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT IT?

ROME: TOTAL WAR

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Creative Assembly

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
1 GHz processor, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb graphics card, 2.9Gb HDD space

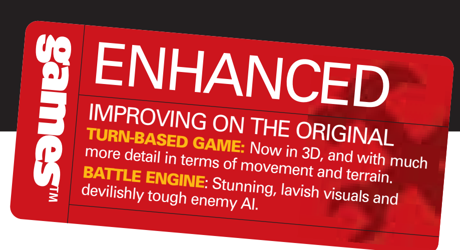
After blowing the world away with the brilliant *Shogun: Total War*, then expanding the series with *Medieval: Total War*, Creative Assembly has turned its attention to legions of Roman troops. And it would appear that the long wait for this title has not been in vain, because everything that *Shogun* and *Medieval* did well, *Rome* does better.

The focus of the game is the single-player campaign mode, a huge and detailed adventure that puts you in charge of one of three factions. From the humble beginnings of owning a few towns and a handful of troops, the aim is to conquer Europe and claim it as Roman, becoming Emperor of Rome along the way. The campaign lasts until you've taken 50 territories and become Emperor, and anyone who thinks this is a couple of evenings' work is in for a shock. Playing on anything other than Easy mode will ensure that this game will last for months.

As followers of the series will know, there are two parts to gameplay: managing your empire and conquering territories, and getting your hands dirty in the battles themselves; and it's good to see both elements of the game have been improved. The turn-based world map is now in lavish 3D, and troop movement is limited by terrain and weather. Armies moving through narrow mountain passes or thick forests will find themselves ambushed along the way, leading to frantic skirmishes that make moving small groups of units incredibly risky; heading over mountain ranges in winter is an arduous task; and tactical decisions must be taken about when to move into certain regions.

The Risk-style province system has been replaced with a more fluid scheme that allows for multiple armies to occupy one province without fighting. This means that defending choke points to a player's territories becomes an integral part of troop assignment, while it also means you can pass through a rival's territory to get at a weaker enemy in the next country. The more battles that are won, the more cities the player controls and the more troops they can produce (provided they invest in the infrastructure of their metropolis); thus the game becomes a balancing act, maintaining the cities under your control while conquering new ones. It isn't easy to keep track of everything, even though cities can manage themselves, and it will challenge even experienced strategy gamers.





LET'S SETTLE DOWN TOGETHER

One of the few disappointing elements of *Rome: Total War* is the way in which generals are created. They cannot be bought by the player, but are instead offered as sons or potential suitors to the player's daughters. Their appearance seems down to blind luck, and without a number of good generals it becomes very difficult for a player to progress. Bizarrely, when producing generals as children, the general will always start in the player's capital city, even if both of his parents live in another country (no doubt leading to some very difficult questions around the family dining table). The result is that generals often have to be ferried from one confrontation to another and this can be time-consuming and a little frustrating.

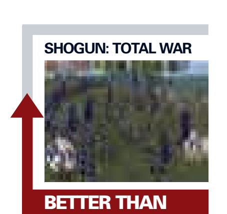
The tactical battles are better than ever thanks to an improved engine and significantly smarter enemy AI. You can now take up to 400 units into battle, leading to some impressive large-scale scraps. As ever, having units work together brings dividends, with archers, infantrymen and cavalry all required to work as one in order for tougher enemies to be vanquished. That they will need to do so is testament to the AI that the computer shows in battle. It regularly beats tactical retreats to stop its weak units getting a pasting, replacing them with soldiers who give as good as they get. In addition, the computer's choice of formation and the finer points of leadership also tend to be the correct ones. Single-unit rushes won't get you anywhere…

Visually, the battles are awesome with incredible detail available to those with the power to run the game in all its glory, while sound is similarly impressive. From the clashing of swords as they meet in bloodthirsty conflict to the inspired speeches of generals before battle, everything you need to find yourself transported back to Roman times is here in abundance.

Multiplayer is available for up to eight players, but there's no online support for the campaign missions; this is limited to individual battles but such is the challenge provided by the campaigns, most players won't need to take the title online to prolong their interest. The structure of the game is such that there are four factions within the Roman Army that expand their influence as the game progresses. Later, these massive forces (of which you are one) turn on each other in a civil war to control Rome, and the huge battles this gameplay mechanic creates more than justify the price tag. Add everything else, and this is a title every self-respecting PC gamer should own.

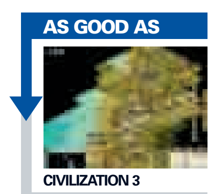


SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



CIVILIZATION 3

FAQs

Q. I'VE GOT THE PREVIOUS GAMES. WHY GET THIS ONE?
Rome: Total War is a huge improvement on an already highly regarded series. You can't afford not to own it.

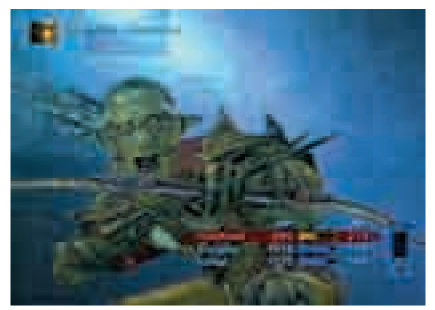
Q. HOW SMART IS THE ENEMY AI?
Smart enough to conceal its units in woodland, lure in troops by having a small group apparently stumble into them, then trick the foolish player into an almighty ambush.

Q. WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE BATTLING?
Players can throw themselves into running the empire and have battles automatically resolved for them.





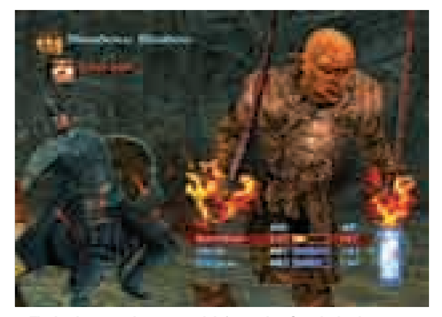
Using siege equipment will make attacking towns much easier.



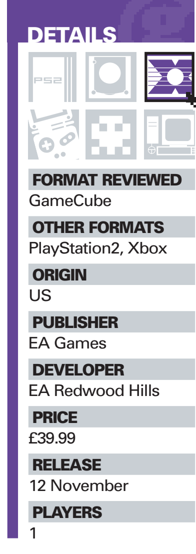
As you can see, the character models are pleasingly detailed.



You see a lot more of the Balrog than the Fellowship ever did.



The battle system is pretty straightforward so Orc-slaying is easy.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
EA Games

DEVELOPER
EA Redwood Hills

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
12 November

PLAYERS
1

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, TRY, TRY AGAIN…

Regardless of whether you rate Tolkien's trilogy, and no matter what you thought of Peter Jackson's films, no-one can disagree with the fact that the franchise deserves better than two average EA hack-'em-ups. Thank God, then, that the latest game is a turn-based RPG. Middle-earth, turn-based battles, levelling up… it's a match made in heaven, surely? Well, yes.

The Third Age follows the adventures of a group of travellers who are never too far behind the 'official' Fellowship. Your travels take you across Middle-earth to many familiar locations; sometimes you'll be behind the Fellowship, sometimes you'll be running in parallel. For example, in the Mines Of Morir you have to find another way into the dungeons after the beast in the lake destroys the Elf Doorway, and you even get to help Gandalf fight the fiery Balrog. The game is technically impressive and faithful to the film licence. There are frame rate issues every now and then, but it's something we're willing to accept given the grandiose environments.

In a turn-based RPG, though, all of this is irrelevant if the battle system isn't up to the job. While *Third Age* doesn't push the boat out in this department, it has a system that works on many levels. Each character, be they Dwarf, Elf, Man or Ranger, has their own unique commands. Experience and levelling-up is achieved in the same way as any other RPG, but new techniques can only be learned by continuously using the abilities you already have. Specific stats can also be raised by completing set quests and earning points. In all, the battle system is very well designed.

Sadly, the adventure itself is far too linear; there's little in the way of side-quests (all you get is the Evil mode that lets you visit old areas as the enemy), and you have no freedom over where you go or what you do. If you can overlook this, though, *The Third Age* does mix a neat battle system with a great franchise to provide a surprisingly enjoyable adventure.

VERDICT 7/10
ENJOYABLE, IF LINEAR, RPG TAKE ON MIDDLE EARTH

LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN
FINAL FANTASY X-2

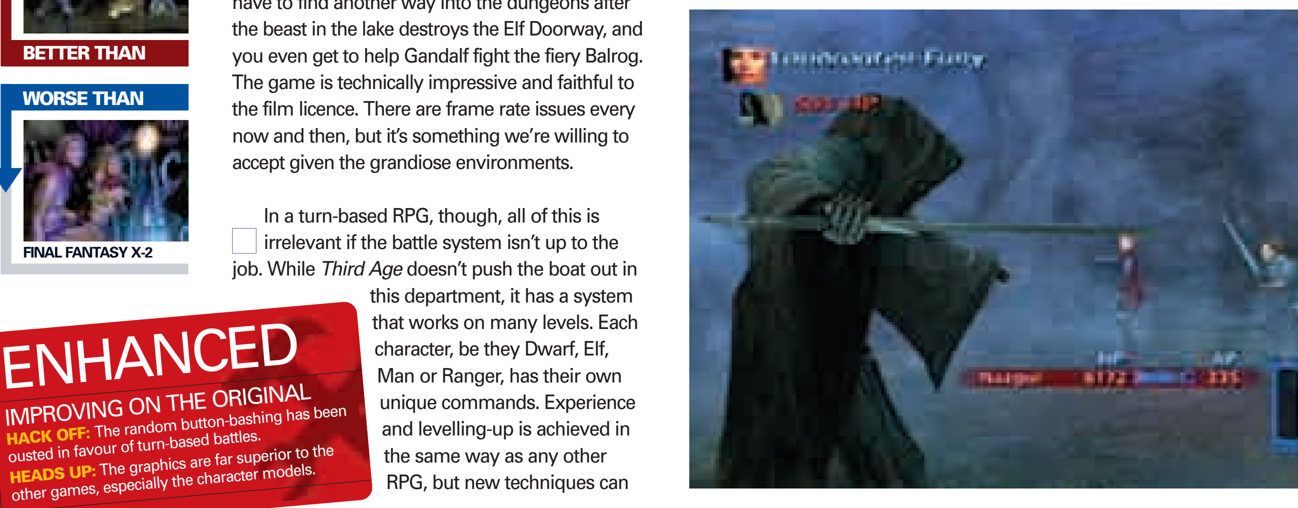
XBOX £39.99



Very similar to the GameCube version. If you're playing on a monitor or HDTV you'll notice the graphics are crisper, and the FMV compression is a little better on the Xbox.

PS2 £39.99

The PS2 version comes out worst with significant frame-rate issues and unimpressive textures. But the differences are so slight they're not really worth worrying about.



games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
HACK OFF: The random button-bashing has been ousted in favour of turn-based battles.
HEADS UP: The graphics are far superior to the other games, especially the character models.

X-MEN LEGENDS

THE AMAZING? NO! THE UNCANNY? NO! THE QUITE DECENT? KER-CHING!

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, Cube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Raven Software

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

X-MEN MUTANT ACADEMY



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

BALDUR'S GATE: DA II

We've just left IceMan to look after himself and he seems to have got himself shot. Odd, considering that only ten minutes ago he was all cocksure that his frozen frame was almost fully bullet resistant. Well, it wasn't and now he's dead. When famously tough superhumans leap into action in games, concessions must be made. They need to have their abilities cropped just so you can build them back up again. We're sure Stan Lee can find a moral there, but we're just going to have to accept it since this is an action RPG first, an accurate depiction of well-documented mutant powers last. For God's sake, Storm, just blow them away with a… storm or something. But… no.

As with all titles that give you super-but-not-quite-yet powers, the net result is a game that features multiple-combo hand-to-hand grunting with characters that you know would normally, say, freeze their enemies solid – but can't. Yet. In comparison, hacking health points off a dark elf makes perfect sense while Wolverine not being able to block melee attacks with his Adamantium claws clearly does not. Still, having four gaudy super-types run through a story that requires maps to be filled with standard enemies that can actually stand up to an attack from the X-Men is not without its fun. In fact, as with all games of the genre, the more who play the merrier it gets, and upgrading your feisty mutants creates the usual sense of building power.



When playing solo you'll find you only want to swap from controlling Wolverine to perform mutant-specific actions at key points since our snickerty-snick friend's strength is in close attacks and automatic healing. Played with a group of friends the game becomes the usual RPG party mix and a soothingly easy exercise in constant combat, while the story handles the X-Men premise with respect.

games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
ACTION RPG: Imagine a game that's pretty much the same as *Baldur's Gate*…
MEN IN TIGHTS: …But with Marvel superheroes instead of your average RPG types.

By maintaining the bright, simple look of a comic, this may seem to be a title that the Xbox can deal with without any issues, yet slowdown often judders its way across the action. It's far from perfect, but Marvel fans have been served well, and those who like their *Gauntlet* served with extra statistics will have a game they can place just behind the last *Dark Alliance*. Excelsior.

PS2/GC £39.99



The GameCube's quartet of controller ports and slightly cleaner visuals put it just ahead of the PS2 version, but neither is quite as clean as on the chunky Microsoft console.



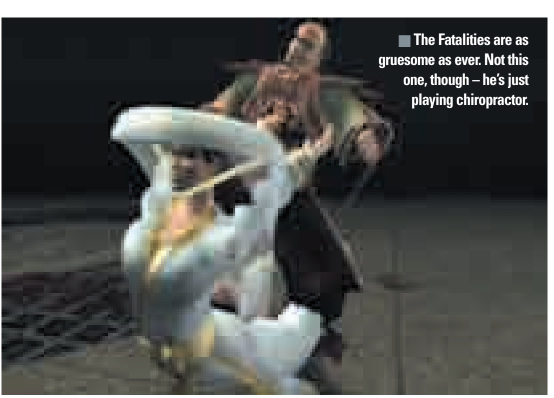
VERDICT 6/10
GENERIC ACTION RPG WITH A 'DIE, MUTIE SCUM!' TWIST





Hanging around at DunAvengin' you can catch up with the X-Men when they're off duty.


Puzzle Kombat is one of the best things about this new title. Stack 'em high.


The Fatalities are as gruesome as ever. Not this one, though – he's just playing chiropractor.

MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

HEY, MIDWAY, YOU'VE GOT RED ON YOU…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

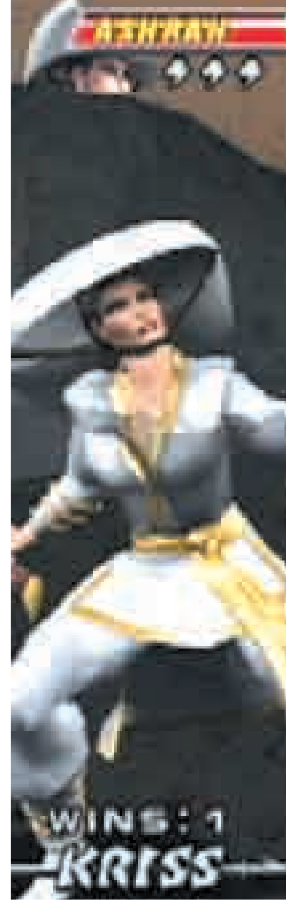
RELEASE
19 November

PLAYERS
1-2

It seems like only yesterday when we were queuing in the arcades and peeking eagerly over shoulders in the hope of catching a glimpse of Johnny Cage knocking Sonya's head off or Sub-Zero removing an enemy's spine. It was brutal, but we loved it. Yet despite being closely followed by controversy wherever it has gone, the *Mortal Kombat* series has continued, building an immense following as it's trundled through its gore-ridden existence – and now the latest in the series has arrived.

Deception seems to have taken *Deadly Alliance* and improved upon it in accordance with what the fans have cried out for. Fatalities have been responsible for separating the series from others in the genre and a key letdown in *Deadly Alliance* was the fact that each character only had one Fatality. In addition to this, Pit Fatalities and all the other amusing finishers we'd come to expect as standard were done away with, thus leaving the game feeling rather empty. Thankfully, this is one area in which *Deception* has done a fair job and a whole host of new ways in which to slice, dice and disembowel your opponents have been reinstated or introduced to keep our bloodlust satisfied.

Other new additions that distract from the main event come in the form of three separate smaller games. The best of these is Puzzle Kombat, a *Tetris*-esque game that combines gore and falling shapes to create an addictive little mini-game that's likely to get far more playtime than Midway perhaps planned. Chess Kombat has also been included. As the name suggests, this is a chess game, but the rules here are different and the pieces have been swapped for *MK* fighters. In order to take a piece you have to fight it, so tactical selection of which character plays each of your pieces is essential. It's a good idea in theory, but after playing for a while we found this mode needlessly arduous and soon ran back to the simple three-bout fights in Vs mode where we



As in *Deadly Alliance*, each character will have three different fighting styles at their disposal.



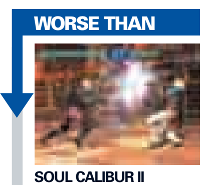


MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SOUL CALIBUR II



could batter each other senseless without having to worry about where we could move next or who was going to cast a spell on us.

The final additional mode, Konquest, has built upon the rather poor Konquest mode of *Deadly Alliance* and it now resembles a small RPG where you can earn Koins, learn moves and unlock characters and new costumes. Unfortunately, even the inclusion of all these extras can't change the fact that on occasion the main Arcade mode will make you want to curl up in a corner and cry with frustration. Although many of the elements missing from *Deadly Alliance* have been included, the actual errors in the way the game plays seem to have been completely ignored. Cheap specials and near-unblockable moves elevate the effectiveness of some characters well above others, and many combos have the potential to eat so far and frequently into your health bar that you might as well drop the pad and start reading up on your Hara-Kiri Move in preparation. In an attempt to ease some of the pain a new 'Breaker' feature has been added to aid the halting of combos, but with only three uses per match allowed, you'll find yourself eating vast quantities of unfair fist when you arrive at later match-ups.

To give the game credit, the series has always been about spilling a good few pints of your opponent's claret all over a netherworldly arena and it delivers exactly this – again. Despite being versions of games that you can find better elsewhere, Puzzle Kombat, Chess Kombat and the spruced up Konquest mode are all nice additions that do a superb job of adding variety to the title and will make parting with your pennies that little bit easier. We have no doubt that the many *Mortal Kombat* fans out there will love and cherish this little title as they have its predecessors, and there are many reasons to justify this… so long as you're happy to ignore the faults. As it happens, we're not.

Our main problem is that *Deception* just doesn't feel like enough of an advance to warrant its own existence. It's what *Deadly Alliance* should have been and it's tough to accept a sequel that's merely included a handful of elements we were expecting to find in a previous title. It's fair to say that *Deception* remains true to the series in that it delivers much of what you'd want from it, though this only means it's a reasonable fighting game with plenty of blood and some grisly deaths. The addition of the extra modes, online play and unlockables are what hoist *Deception* up to just above average, but we were hoping for more.



VERDICT 6/10
KOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH BETTER



THE END IS NIGH

Realising that removing many of the finishers in *Deadly Alliance* was an obvious error, the Stage and Pit Fatalities have returned, each character has two Fatalities, and a shiny new way to end a confrontation has been included – a Hara-Kiri Move. For those whose knowledge of ancient Japanese rituals is a little hazy, hara-kiri was an act of suicide performed by Japanese warriors who wished to retain honour when they were about to be killed. *Deception* has harnessed this idea and created arguably the most appealing element seen in the series for a long time. Rather than just sitting back and watching as your victorious rival mashes his pad in an effort to unleash some gore-tastic finisher upon your battered person, you can challenge the execution of his Fatality with your Hara-Kiri Move. This will see you taking your own life and robbing him of the pleasure of a decent kill – if you can manage it before he completes his button sequence, of course.



Many characters – like Kabal here – have made a comeback after sitting a few games out.

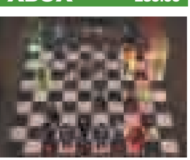
FAQs

Q. ANY OLD FRIENDS?
Yup. Sindel, Ermac and Nightwolf to name just a few.

Q. SO WHO'S THE BIG BADDIE?
It's the evil Dragon King this time round.

Q. ANYTHING ELSE OF INTEREST?
Raiden's evil and Liu Kang's a zombie apparently.

XBOX £39.99



The usual slightly shorter loading times and sharper visuals are what make the Xbox version a little more appealing than the PlayStation2's offering. Also, although both consoles will support online play, Xbox Live is bound to be the smoother ride.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Acclaim

DEVELOPER
Team 17

PRICE
£39.99

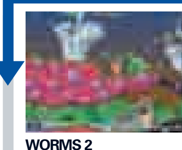
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

WORMS 3D

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



WORMS 2

■ Level design is as exuberant and eccentric as ever but not nearly as destructible as previous *Worms* titles.

TIME TO FIND OUT IF WORMS REALLY ARE SPINELESS

WORMS: FORTS UNDER SIEGE

Worms 3D **wasn't the success Team 17 was hoping for; it was simply too tough with too little reward.** With this in mind, the developer has shifted the emphasis from 'team versus team' to 'fort versus fort', the idea being that stationary targets are easier to hit. The forts themselves don't just exist for target practice either. In the style of classic real-time strategy games, you start by building towers and keeps to bolster the selection of buildings available to you. Hospitals, science labs, weapon centres and so on all have their own advantages, so deciding what to build next and which building to protect from enemy fire adds a strategic element to the series that belies the cutesy exterior.

The only question is if you want to get there. Adding a third dimension to the classic *Worms* gameplay proved a step too far for most gamers. Adding the need to build and defend forts on top of that makes learning the intricacies of *Under Siege* even tougher. When you consider each projectile weapon now has a vastly different weight, the time taken to learn the game has increased. As the most powerful weapons are only available by sitting on top of your fort and aiming at your rival's buildings, the system of fort versus fort unwittingly places an emphasis on learning how to aim – the trickiest part of the game. While non-moving targets should be easier to hit, hitting anything at all has become much harder.

Those who persist will find it is worth the trouble. Tellingly, multiplayer has the most noteworthy moments as you won't find each missed shot punished by a militarily accurate reply, and Xbox Live support will breathe new life into the series. Later missions also test your skills to breaking point, unlike the early missions that seem unfairly tough and provide little excitement during what should be the honeymoon period. *Forts Under Siege* might have enough reward on offer but the series is still relying on gamers to meet it halfway by investing ample time and patience in learning its demanding intricacies.



games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
FORT BOYARD: Constructing and protecting forts is now the aim of the game, and along with that…
BOMBS AWAY: …new weapons are available for the forts such as Cluster Launchers and Ballistas.

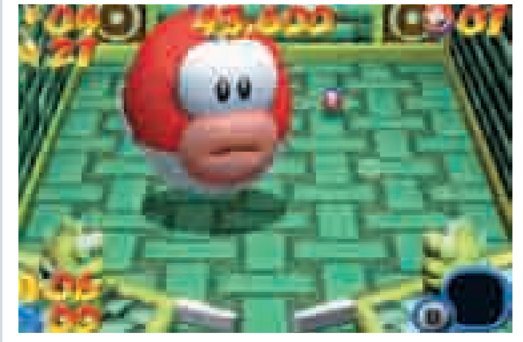
PS2 £39.99

Control isn't an issue as *Worms* is very straightforward with moving and navigating menus taking up the majority of the game. The issue will be how the online game holds up – Xbox Live has an enviable track record for reliability, which the PS2 currently lacks.

VERDICT 6/10
GOOD BUT BURIED UNDER A STEEP LEARNING CURVE







Progress can be made by collecting Stars (allowing you to open up the numbered doors) and by claiming special keys from the bosses.



Many of the challenges involve killing multiple enemies.



SUPER MARIO BALL

GOOD THINGS COME IN ROUND PACKAGES, SUPPOSEDLY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Fuse Games

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
26 November

PLAYERS
1

Mario? In a pinball game? Don't look so surprised – it's hardly the strangest situation that Nintendo's plumber has ever found himself in. Plus there's the fact that it's one genre where he's been beaten to the punch by his old rival, Sonic. If a speedy blue hedgehog can play pinball without a hitch, there's no reason why Mario shouldn't be able to as well.

We'd suggest his chances might be better if *Super Mario Ball* was a 'proper' pinball game… but it's not. Whereas *Pokémon Pinball* at least stuck to many of the traditions of the genre (bumpers, ramps, kickers and the like) while trying to integrate the 'catch 'em all' angle, *Super Mario Ball* does it backwards and instead adds just a dash of pinball magic to what is otherwise a very familiar Mario adventure. Interestingly, this isn't nearly as much of a problem as you might expect – indeed, the game is rather enjoyable for all its uniqueness – but it does mean members of the pinball hardcore should look elsewhere for a game that will fulfil their high-score obsessive needs.

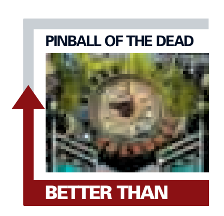
That's because the focus of *Super Mario Ball* isn't on how many points you can score, but your progress through the game's adventure. You're offered multiple worlds to move between, each split into distinct areas that have their own challenges to overcome in order to claim a Star. The fact that Mario (in his ball form) can only be controlled with the flippers at the bottom of each area means that the action is distilled into its purest form – kill anything that moves by knocking Mario into it, activate switches by flipping him onto them, collect any shiny objects by, er, hitting him over them and generally enter any holes you find to discover new locations where you can do this all over again.

This might sound a chore but it's actually good fun and the challenges, while slightly limited in their range, are demanding enough to keep you playing. However, there's a major flaw in actually controlling Mario, as the physics just don't seem to act as they should – aiming at specific targets can be extremely tricky at times, making completing some tasks more infuriating than challenging. It's a shame, because everything else about *Super Mario Ball* is so impressive; the visuals, sound and large amount of speech all show that Fuse has really pushed the GBA to its limits. However, a fundamental flaw in the game's core premise, not to mention the relative brevity of the adventure, makes it hard to find this anything more than an enjoyable distraction rather than a classic addition to Mario's repertoire.

FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
BALLS TO THE WALL: The game's pinball roots are obvious, but it's not typical of the genre.
IT'S-A ME: The emphasis on *Mario*-style challenges, rather than normal pinball scoring, makes this unique.

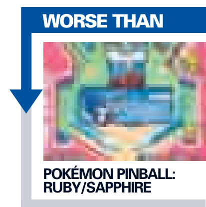
VERDICT 6/10
AN ENJOYABLE, IF RATHER LIMITED, EFFORT

PINBALL OF THE DEAD

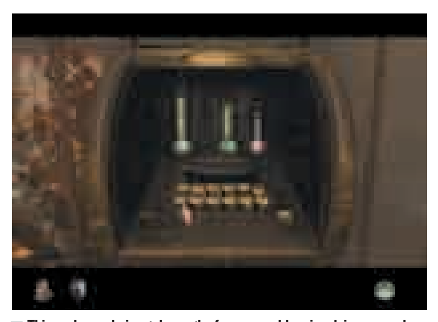


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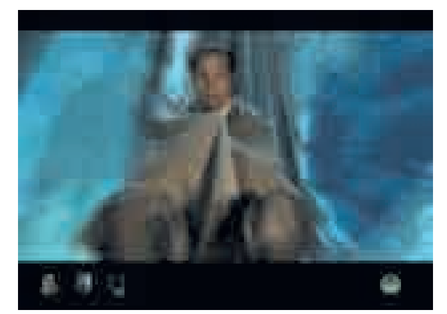
WORSE THAN



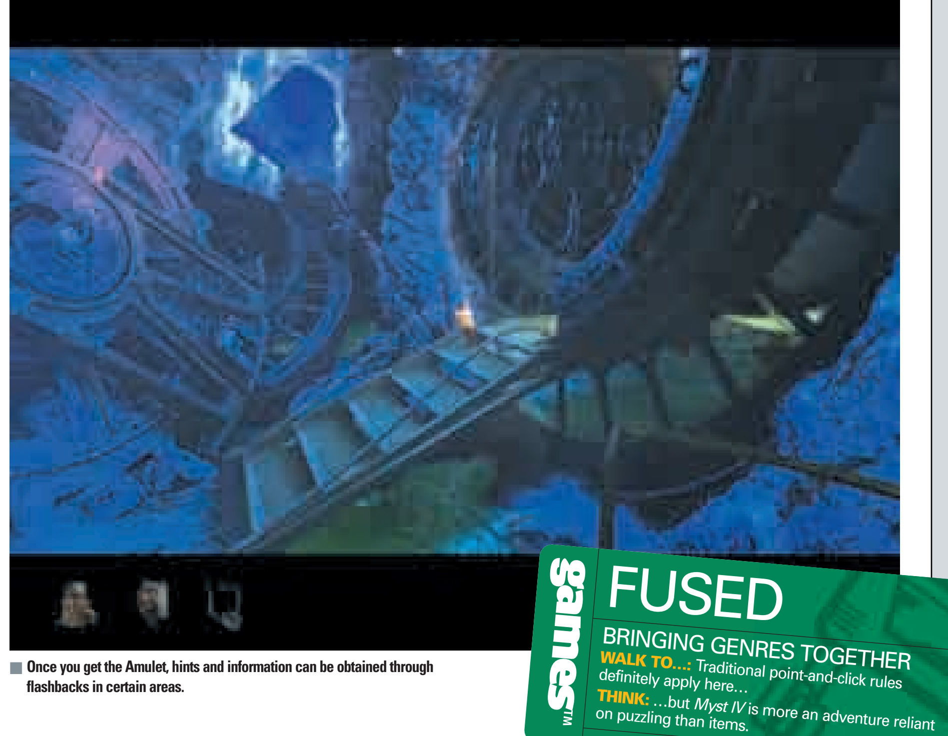
POKÉMON PINBALL: RUBY/SAPPHIRE



This early puzzle is a take on the famous problem involving several jugs and an odd measurement of liquid.



When it's not making you feel clever after a tricky puzzle, this is exactly how *Myst IV* can make you feel.



Once you get the Amulet, hints and information can be obtained through flashbacks in certain areas.

games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
WALK TO…: Traditional point-and-click rules definitely apply here…
THINK: …but *Myst IV* is more an adventure reliant on puzzling than items.

TAKING LIFE ONE SCREEN AT A TIME

MYST IV: REVELATION

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Cyan Worlds

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, 700MHz CPU, 128Mb RAM (256Mb on XP), 32Mb VRAM

I can't use these things together!", "That doesn't work!", "I can't use these things together!", "That doesn't work!", "I can't use these things together!", "That doesn't work!"… As any point-and-click veteran will tell you, the advent of spoken adventures wasn't as wonderful as it first seemed. While hearing Max discuss the merits of wanton violence with Sam, or Eric Idle spouting nonsense as Rincewind are great examples of why we'd never turn our backs on talking games, the problems start when inventory puzzles go bad. A fit of desperation as every item is used on every other triggers the constant repetition of often a single quote, which soon grates to the point of causing that rare gaming condition: Repetitive Strain Injury of the brain. Those days are not quite over, yet *Myst IV* manages to find new ways to frustrate…

The tapping hand that represents a lack of any other interaction with an object soon begins to annoy as much as the classic point-and-click 'I can't use that here' – you see far too much of it as you search for the tiniest of switches or an overly wordy journal, and it's almost as though a curious chimp is attempting the varied string of puzzles. These vary greatly in difficulty, complexity and, to a lesser extent, quality, generally inducing a fair amount of head scratching before they move aside and allow progress. Thankfully, there's a handy tri-level hint function available for each of the game's puzzles, offering the choice of cryptic clues, nudges in the right direction and full walkthroughs depending on just how stuck you feel. It may be cheating, but on a positive note, at least you'll never be so frustrated that you get the urge to turn *Myst* into a Frysbee.

The real shame is that it's the bits between the puzzling that bring the whole package down. Aesthetically, *Myst IV* never fails to impress, but hunting for a switch or puzzle clue among the beautiful environments often comes down to simply sweeping the disembodied hand down the screen in the hope of finding something rather than relying on initiative and logic, fundamental aspects of the series that seem strangely absent outside the game's core puzzles. For fans of the series and gamers of a patient disposition this is good old-fashioned puzzling (albeit on the staccato side), but most people will yearn for something more consistent and involving.

VERDICT 6/10
PASSABLE 'EXPLORING' BREAKS UP GOOD PUZZLES

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MYST III: EXILE

ADVANCE GUARDIAN HEROES

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Treasure

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

EIGHT YEARS ON, GUARDIAN HEROES ADVANCES

Treasure is just showing off now. Having earned a reputation for producing consistently excellent games, there seems to be no reason for it to make a game this ambitious for the GBA other than because it can. To choose Nintendo's handheld as the platform for the sequel to *Guardian Heroes*, a 1996 Sega Saturn title regarded as one of the best beat-'em-ups of all time, seems madness until you see just what Treasure can coax out of the system.

Advance Guardian Heroes shares the same strong sense of design and set-pieces as its forebear, and given that there are only four buttons available the controls are remarkable. Blocking, countering, using magic and air-dashing are all easily performed alongside the usual attacking options. Pressing attack with various directions also results in different moves, so this combo system is flexible enough to allow you to experiment and formulate different tactics for each enemy, a simple but pleasing touch.

As the action on screen increases, so does the need to counter – tap block at the right time and you have the perfect (and more often than not, only) opportunity to fight back. The chaotic action can reduce countering to little more than guesswork, but there's enough leniency in the timing to guide you through. Devil mode is also interesting, allowing you a few minutes of invulnerability when you die before you reach the final Game Over screen. While it initially seems pointless, it grants the luxury of being able to figure out boss patterns and weak points, saving the trial and error process that can cause so much frustration.

It's just a shame that for all the hard work that's been poured into filling the levels with multiple explosions, scrolling effects and numerous enemies, some simple areas have been overlooked. There's an alarming lack of polish, with characters looking more like rough sketches than finalised art and only boasting a few frames of animation. The storyline is also hard to follow thanks to roughshod translation and there are difficulty spikes to test the patience of any gamer. Even so, it's hard not to recommend *Advance Guardian Heroes* thanks to the deep fighting system and just to see what your GBA can do when it breaks into a sweat.

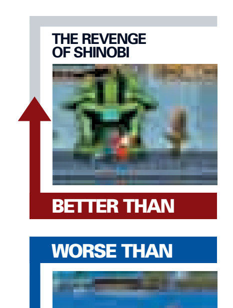




games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
BUST-A-MOVE: Despite only having four buttons available, this game offers a deep combo system.
ANOTHER LEVEL: You can level up your character between stages, depending on the crystals collected.

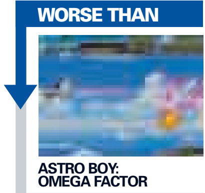
VERDICT 7/10
DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR

Some of the animation is a bit ropey and characters look a little scrappy, but the overall design is terrific.





THE CAMERA NEVER LIES

IF PLAY AND GROOVE ARE GATHERING DUST THEN LOOK NO FURTHER…

PlayStation2 owners – fed up with dodgy third-party controllers falling apart in your hands? Had your fill of dance mats, lightguns, steering wheels and such nonsense? Thought so. Then how do you fancy trying out the ultimate controller? One that will last for years; one that won't break after extended use; one that's as reliable as you are. How so? you cry. Because it is you.

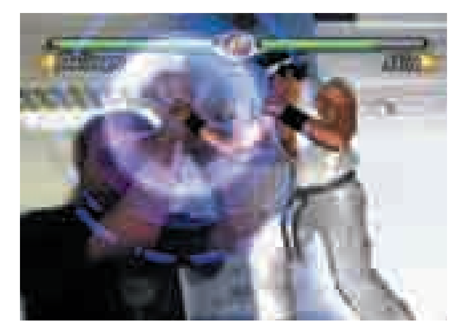
Okay, so referring to the EyeToy as 'ultimate' is stretching the truth slightly – the very nature of the peripheral means that it will never be 100 per cent accurate, but this is almost always levelled out by just how enjoyable making a fool of yourself in the comfort of your own home can be.

So kick back, relax and see what games could mark your EyeToy's return to splendour. Then get up, jump around, knock over a drink while going for a roundhouse kick in a boxing match and really, really regret it the morning after…

RANGE OF GAMES A little variety goes a long way

Sega Superstars

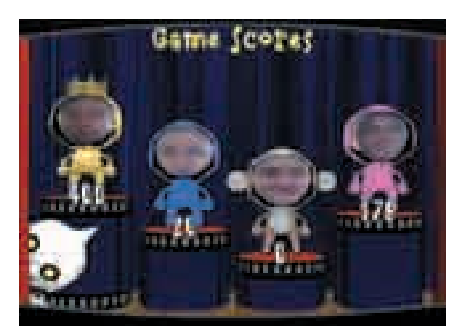
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: £29.99
PLAYERS: 1
RELEASE: Out Now



Sega's trademark characters are a varied bunch – everything from zombies to foxtrotting TV presenters is in here somewhere. So with each of them hosting one of the 12 mini-games on this title, variety isn't really a problem. Each game is based on an existing Sega title that's been adapted to require various arm movements, noises and slaps to control: Monkey Balls are controlled by tilting your arms in specific directions and Ulala's dance moves become significantly trickier when you actually have to perform them. Whether you're emulating a seizure in order to hail a passing cab or cruising through a ring-filled tunnel with everyone's favourite blue hedgehog, there's plenty on offer here.

EyeToy: Play 2

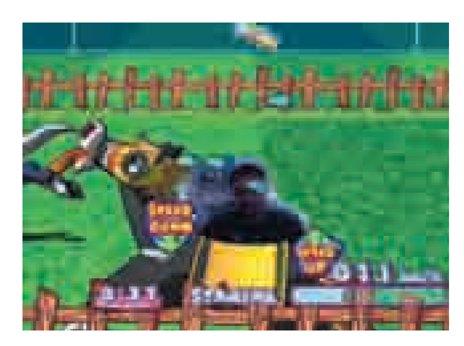
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
RELEASE: Out Now



Sony's own candidate offers the most games, choosing quick-fire mini-games over lengthier workouts. In single-player, these are strung together into 12 themed gaming sessions – the Secret Agent games, for example, play out in succession. The game is clearly more at home in multiplayer, though. With three short events compered by Teletubby wannabes bearing the players' faces, competition is fierce and often sees several people crammed onto the screen for a multi-man decider. With almost a hundred events and plenty of extra stuff to play around with (as the game's name suggests), *Play 2* easily has the most to do, and the most variety, of any of the three games here.

U-Move Super Sports

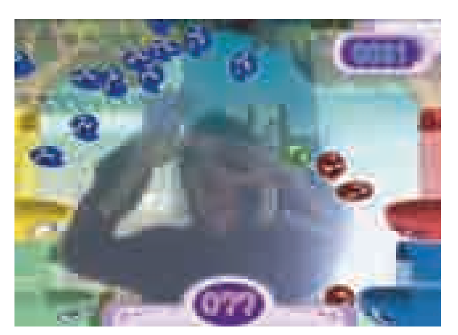
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Konami
PRICE: £24.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
RELEASE: Out Now



When the title says you'll be playing sports games, its pretty obvious that the range is going to suffer. Sure, the 15 games cover six sporting events but two-thirds of these are based on football. Quality here is far more erratic than in the other games and while some of the games are great fun, others are a waste of time. Why play a *Breakout* clone with a football using your hand as a paddle? Feeble ideas like this should never have got past the concept stage. And this is the main problem – the 'sports' seldom go further than the appropriate ball (two of the football games are pinball and a side-scrolling avoid-'em-up) and even then they don't do a great job of holding your attention.

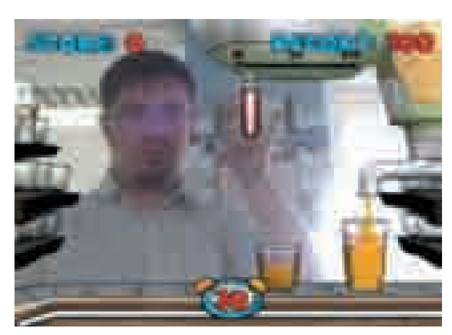
ORIGINALITY Yes, but is it just more of the same?

Sega Superstars



With so many EyeToy games relying on belting ninjas off the screen or clapping desperately in order to squash attackers, it's good to see that *Sega Superstars* has introduced a new control method. This involves moving cursors to nudge your character around a course, and while it's tricky at first, once you've got the hang of it the system makes the games that use it really stand out. This aside, there's not much here that you won't find in other titles – except Sega characters, of course.

EyeToy: Play2



Some games, like the boxing and kung fu ones, retread old ground while improving on *Play*, but they're mostly well thought-out and enjoyable. You'll be strumming an air guitar one minute, chopping pickles the next and even competing in athletics competitions, running and jumping like an Olympic hopeful. The real gem is EyeToy Cameo, a new feature that allows you to use your own face in a selection of mini-games and full products – *This Is Football 2005* is the first title to offer Cameo support.

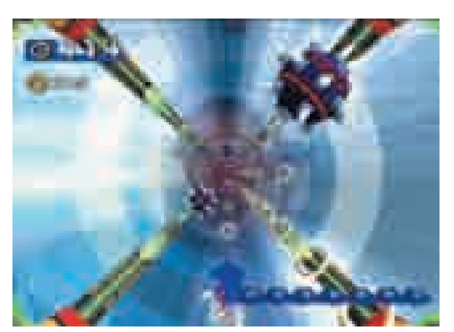
U-Move Super Sports



Sadly, we found little in the way of originality here. Although there's a fair selection of games, most of them require you to do exactly what you've done a hundred times before. The quirky stylised visuals are about the only thing that you won't have seen before (unless you've seen purple penguins partaking in a spot of curling) and the cartoon theme and surreal characters provide a reasonable amount of amusement. Not exactly what we were looking for in the way of originality, though.

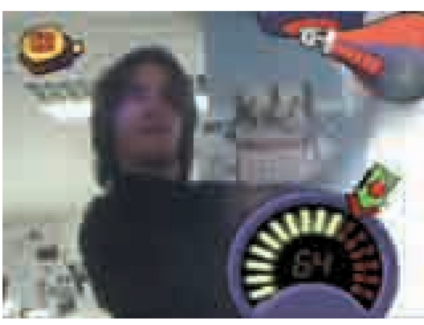
FUNCTIONALITY We know it works, but how well?

Sega Superstars



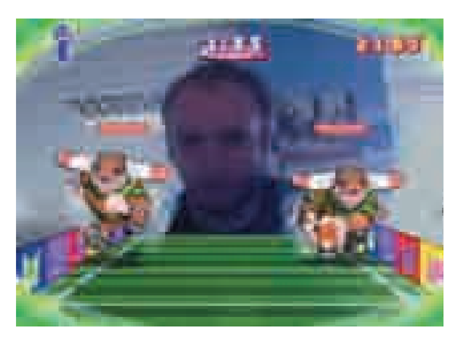
Until you nail the knack of controlling your cursors, the Monkey Ball and NiGHTS games will prove near impossible and will often end up with you flailing around as your character heads off in a random direction. Fortunately – like most things – this is just a matter of time, and the controls work perfectly once you've mastered where you're meant to be waving your hands. As with most other EyeToy titles quick movements can also cause problems, but thankfully these speedy motions aren't required very often and *Sega Superstars* suffers much less than the other titles in this area. The only real problem we found was matching Ulala's funky dance moves in the *Space Channel 5* game. This seemed extremely difficult and just decided not to respond on some occasions, which is particularly annoying in a game demanding precision movements with every beat.

EyeToy: Play2



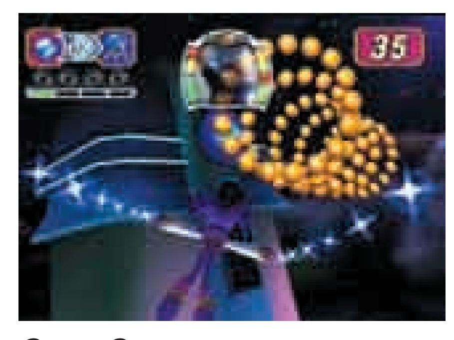
It's Sony's toy, so naturally it knows how to use it, but it's not all as clear-cut as you might hope. A lot of the new games require you to move an on-screen object, be it cutting wood with a jigsaw or shaking seasoning onto fries – fun when it works but something that can (and occasionally does) cause confusion when quick movements make hand and item part company. Still, with so much here that works well – or at least well enough – a few moments of mayhem can't detract from the overall fun factor; a strong selling point for Sony's handiwork. Best of all in this field is the Playroom, a host of 'ideas' as opposed to games proper which really showcase the potential of the camera hardware. Seeing yourself superimposed over a solar system may have limited appeal in the home but we can't believe for a second that there's a club in the land where this wouldn't draw a crowd.

U-Move Super Sports



No real problems here. Many of the usual EyeToy annoyances are still present but small errors are to be expected. Extraordinary saves are performed as some footballs bounce off lumps of nothingness, and dismay fills the room as another passes through your face and hits the net. These errors are few and far between, though, so it's not really a huge problem. Our main complaint is the lack of proper instruction on some events. It's fine when you've been playing for a while and know the ins and outs, but first-time players are likely to struggle when first told to spank a horse in moderation, given a few brief tips and then just thrown into a race. But overall, simplicity ensures that most of the games are easy enough to pick up and play, even if the majority aren't that entertaining. Konami's framework is solid enough, it's just a shame that the games themselves fail to capitalise on this.

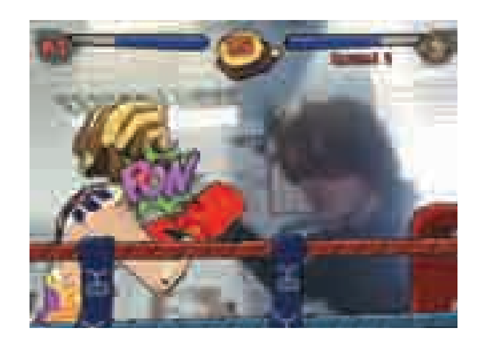
BEST/WORST GAMES Hunting highs and lows



Sega Superstars

BEST: NiGHTS
Use your aerial skills to glide over a fantasy world and through floating rings to reach the goals. Looks superb and controls surprisingly well. Extreme skills required.

WORST: Crazy Taxi
This is just silly. Flail your arms around and scream like a banshee in order to get the attention of a passing cabbie. Crazy? Reasonably. Rubbish? Definitely.



EyeToy: Play2

BEST: KnockOut
Although it may not be perfectly responsive, the boxing game is the most engrossing use of the EyeToy we've seen. The inter-bout training games aren't too bad either.

WORST: Secret Agent
Fun for all of 17 seconds, the series of games that involves moving slowly or keeping still to avoid detection is far too easy and repetitive to play more than once.



U-Move Super Sports

BEST: Curling
Just like the real thing – sort of. Rub the ice away as fast as you can to clear a path. Features misshapen penguins and much frantic arm flailing.

WORST: Yellow Card
Run from ref to ref trying to persuade them not to give you a yellow card. By waving. Not exactly what we'd call fun.

SUMMARY But is it still fun the morning after?

Sega Superstars

Generally, this is an entertaining package. Although many of the games are simple and merely variations of ideas found in every other EyeToy title, the fact that you're playing with some of Sega's most popular characters makes for a slightly more enjoyable experience. Although nothing altogether ground-breaking has been achieved here, it's the familiarity that'll keep you prancing around in front of your TV long after the appeal of juggling Puyos and heading balls should have worn off. Unfortunately, this suffers for the lack of any multiplayer options, so play is very much based around bettering high scores rather than direct competition.

VERDICT 6/10

EyeToy: Play 2

Whether you're looking for a quick and simple one-player game that anyone can play, a crazy party game or a healthy workout, *Play 2* delivers in spades. This may also be the first time an EyeToy game has experiences of such depth – HomeRun is a proper little baseball game complete with batting and running for bases while the extended versions of many of the games warrant more time investment than most of the original game put together. It may still be a novelty title at heart (as with many EyeToy games), but with so many possibilities the novelty won't wear off quite as quickly as you might have feared.

VERDICT 7/10

U-Move Super Sports

Konami's first foray into the crazy world of EyeToy is far from horrible – games like Curling and Horse Racing use the hardware well and are genuinely quite fun – but the real problem comes from the sporting constraints the title sets itself. Many of the games follow similar themes and, worse still, even some of these specific sports games have been done better in *EyeToy: Play 2*. The lower price will surely entice a few extra buyers and why not? This is a passable game but one unlucky to be released so close to two much more ambitious and enjoyable affairs. Alas, this is simply a case of too little, too late. But Konami can always build on this experience.

VERDICT 5/10

WINNER

EyeToy: Play2

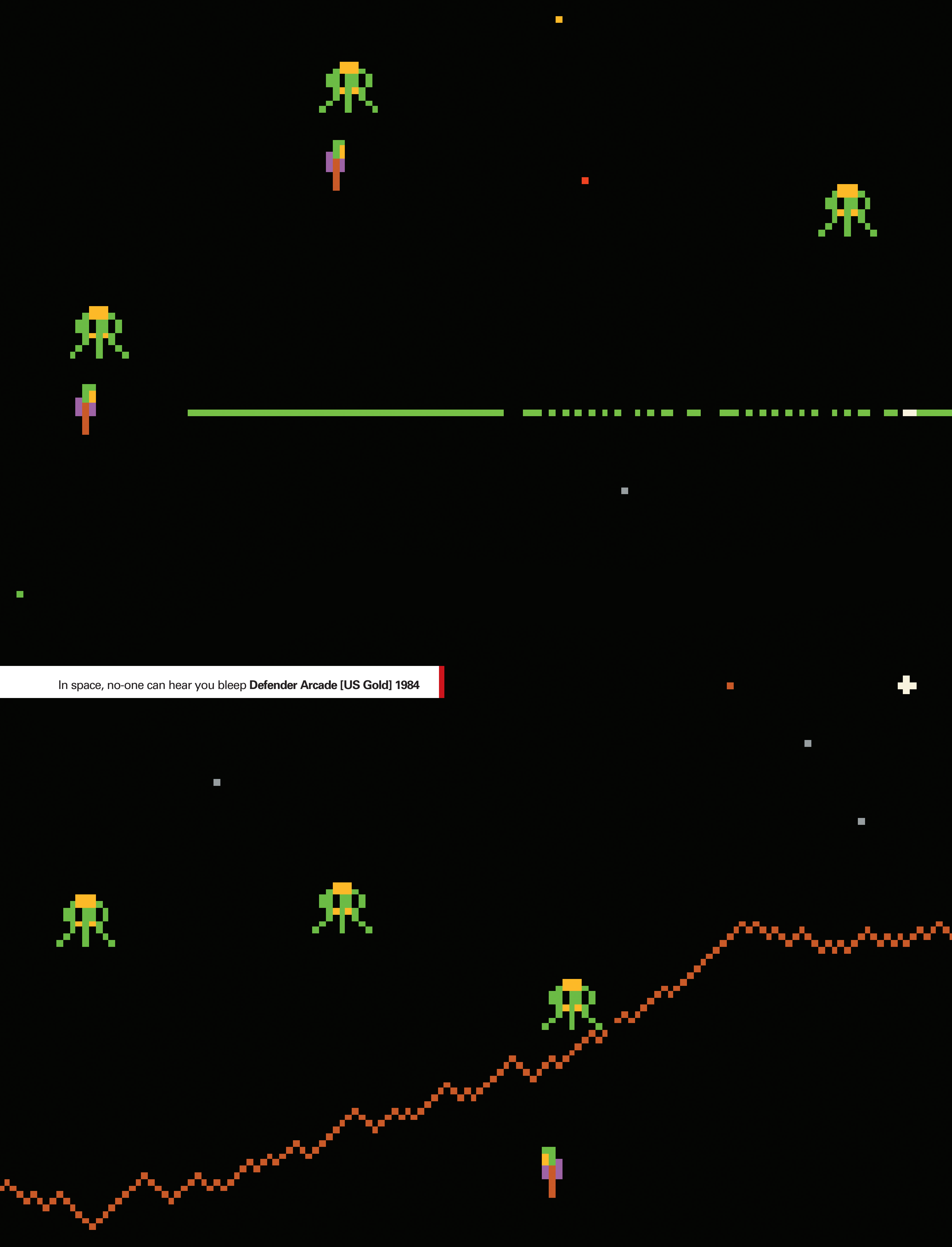
It might seem slightly unfair on Sega and Konami seeing as this is Sony's home turf, but there can be little doubt that *EyeToy: Play 2* is the best use of the peripheral so far. The games themselves are solid and enjoyable with any number of players (although multiplayer is a definite highlight) and the potential shown by Cameo and demonstrated in the many so-called 'experiments' in the game's Playroom really fills us with hope for the future of the peripheral. In the meantime, though, we'll just be going for the ultimate KnockOut and laughing at each others' ridiculous faces for the next couple of weeks. Or months. If only we didn't wake up the morning after each extended session of EyeToy exertion with sore places where there shouldn't even be places…



"EYETOY: PLAY 2 MAY BE A NOVELTY TITLE AT HEART, BUT WITH SO MANY POSSIBILITIES THE NOVELTY WON'T WEAR OFF TOO QUICKLY"



With its bold mix of mini-games, experiments, multiplayer action and more, *EyeToy: Play 2* is the superior EyeToy title.



In space, no-one can hear you bleep **Defender Arcade [US Gold] 1984**




eMag



A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.25 NOV 2004
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RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
games™ GOES TO THE MOVIES
We take a look at some classic film licences
CLASH OF THE TITANS
ROADBLASTERS
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
THE GREATEST GAME EVER?
Classic Machine: VIRTUAL BOY
AN INTERVIEW WITH BEN DAGLISH
PLUS
RETRO NEWS,
ROM SERVICE,
BUYERS GUIDE & GTM,
RETRO CONTACT,
ULTIMATE COLLECTION
AND MUCH MORE...

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

It's three in the morning, my long-forgotten coffee is developing a thick skin of mucus and I need to be up in five hours to look after my young daughter. Yet I'm unable to leave my Xbox…

I've now sold my life, time and soul to *OutRun 2* and, boy, does it feel good. Fighting off sleep and trying to keep my eyes open, I try to remember the last time I had this much fun.

Waking up the next morning with my Controller S still firmly grasped in my hands, it suddenly dawns on me; the last time I was this addicted to a game was with the original *OutRun*. As I go through the daily Saturday routines – take the wife to work, give my daughter her breakfast – I recall all those moments from my youth and suddenly realise just how much of my life I'd wasted down my local arcade playing the likes of *OutRun*, *Prehistoric Isle* and *Chase HQ*.

Playing *OutRun 2* brought all those joyful memories flooding back in a way that nothing else has managed and for that I'm truly grateful (even if I do stagger around the office in a perpetually tired state). Nostalgia can be an incredibly powerful thing and if you're able to recapture the same feelings that I was able to while you're flicking through the current issue of Retro, I'll be very happy indeed.



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

The (retro) show must go on

New retro game show hits the internet



A TV show about retro gaming, a real dream come true for many gamers, is ready to hit the net. *Retro Core* is an internet-based show created by Mark Smith who currently lives in Japan. The first show will be available from www.segagagadomain.com/retrocore.htm soon, but we spoke to Mark to find out more…

games™: Where did the idea for *Retro Core* come from?
MS: It started about a year ago when I was reading about the big retro boom in the UK. It got me thinking that a retro-related gaming show could be a fantastic idea. Thanks to having to return to the UK for three months, my idea had to be put on hold for what seemed like an eternity. Then *Consolevania* [an internet-based games show] started to become really popular and that gave me some more inspiration to get the idea finally rolling.

g™: You've selected quite a few 'hardcore' titles for the first show. Will you be making future shows more mainstream?
MS: Yeah, the first show will cater more for the 'hardcore' gamer since I believe it's this person who is generally more interested in the retro scene. Hopefully, as the show gains a wider audience, you'll be seeing more mainstream games starting to creep in. The show will remain, for the most part, dedicated to the more serious gamer but there will be stuff that the casual gamer will know. You won't be seeing the likes of *FIFA*, though.



▲ All your retro TV show are belong to us. Well, we say 'us', we mean 'Mark Smith' of course. Silly us.

games™: What sort of style can we expect from the show?
MS: A very amateur style [laughs]. Really though, I'm making this show on my own which takes quite a lot of time and effort so it's not going to look as polished as *Consolevania*. I'm aiming at producing some sort of presenter-free show – you know, like what the *Chart Show* used to be like when it was on ITV, only *Retro Core* will have my voice speaking over it instead of text boxes popping up.

games™: How much interest has there been in *Retro Core*?
MS: I've had great interest in the project. I want the gaming community to know about the hidden gems that they may have passed over on their previous consoles and those that they would have never have had access to, such as the PC Engine or Sharp X68000 games.

games™: When will the show be ready and how frequent will they be?
MS: I hope that the first show will be ready for early November. As for how often they will appear is a question I can't answer at the moment. I already have the plans for the next show that will feature a covert video of inside a retro arcade (it's illegal to video in arcades in Japan). The problem is that I'm currently unemployed, so finding a new job and settling in is my main priority at the moment.

games™: What do you think about the current interest in retro gaming?
MS: I think it's wonderful. People are finally realising that great graphics don't necessarily equal great games. Many of the PlayStation generation have missed out on so many great classics, but now with retro gaming becoming fashionable again they are able to see where many of their modern favourites originated.

the CHARTS in Nov 1991

UK Music Charts

1 DIZZY	VIC REEVES & THE WONDER STUFF
2 GET READY FOR THIS	2 UNLIMITED
3 (EVERYTHING I DO) I DO IT FOR YOU	BRYAN ADAMS
4 RHYTHM IS A MYSTERY	K-KLASS
5 THE FLY	U2
6 IF YOU WERE WITH ME NOW	KYLIE MINOGUE/ KEITH WASHINGTON
7 WORLD IN UNION	KIRI TE KANAWA
8 ACTIV 8 (COME WITH ME)	ALTERN 8
9 IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?	BASSHEADS
10 BLACK OR WHITE	MICHAEL JACKSON

Mega Drive games you were playing in 1991

1 BONANZA BROTHERS	SEGA
2 WRESTLE WARS	SEGA
3 SWORD OF VERMILLION	SEGA
4 PGA TOUR GOLD	ELECTRONIC ARTS
5 AEROBLASTERS	KANEKO
6 ROAD RASH	ELECTRONIC ARTS
7 THUNDERFORCE III	TECHNOSOFT
8 KLAX	SEGA
9 DICK TRACY	SEGA
10 MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE	SEGA

Small memory, big games

Here's your chance to make a difference

If you fancy something a little different, why not take part in this year's Minigame competition voting?

The contest sees programmers creating titles for 8-bit computers and consoles, with the games-playing public deciding which is the best new title. There are two categories – 1k or 4k – and this year's competition has seen over 50 entries and covers the Atari 2600, Commodore 64, Spectrum, Oric and many more.

All the finished games are available on the Minigame website and you can download as many as you like. Text adventures, platformers, shoot-'em-ups and puzzle titles are all there to be voted for.

Visit www.ffd2.com/minigame and check them out for yourself.

GAMING NEWS

More Cronosoft goodies

New old games on the way

Cronosoft has been extremely busy lately, pumping out new titles for old formats. *Cyber Wing* is a brand new shoot-'em-up for the Commodore 64 and is available in tape or disk format for a measly £1.99. It's a neat, frenetic blaster that brings back happy memories of *Armalyte* and *Uridium* – two of our favourite C64 shooters.

The Smirking Horror, on the other hand, is Cronosoft's first Amstrad release and is a text adventure written by Jason Davis. We've not had a chance to look at it yet but, like *Cyber Wing*, it will also be available on cassette and disc for just £1.99.

Cronosoft has also revealed that its popular Commodore 64 title *Reaxion* will now be heading to other formats including the Atari 800/XL/XE range and the Spectrum.

Cyber Wing, *The Smirking Horror* and the C64 version of *Reaxion* are all available now from www.cronosoft.co.uk.

More SNK hits head for the PS2

Two-dimensional classics to drop in on Sony console

It would appear that SNK is getting ready to release more titles from its back catalogue on the PS2 in Japan. No prices or dates have been confirmed yet, but the list we've seen is already looking pretty mouth-watering and will be essential for beat-'em-up fans everywhere.

***King Of Fighters '94 Re-Bout*, *Twinkle Star Sprites* and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* will all appear as single releases, while *King Of Fighters '95-'97*, *King Of Fighters '98-'00* and *Bakumatsu Roman* and *Last Blade* will be getting released as compilations.**

After speaking to Playmore, it's quite possible that these lists may change slightly (no *Metal Slug* seems like a major oversight), but it's great to see that the classic Neo Geo range is still being supported. Let's just hope we're given solid conversions with plenty of extras.



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events

DECEMBER '04

Psikyo Shooting Collection Vol.2: Sengoku Ace and Sengoku Blade

Date: 2 December (Japan) **Developer:** Psikyo **Price:** £30
Shumps are getting a lot of coverage at the moment and this dual pack from Taito is looking very promising. We remember paying a fortune for *Sengoku Blade* on the Saturn, so £30 sounds like an absolute bargain.

Chaos Field

Date: 16 December (Japan) **Developer:** MileStone **Price:** £28
The Dreamcast refuses to die and MileStone's *Chaos Field* is the latest shooter to grace Sega's console. This is looking like the perfect title to complement *Border Down*, *Psyvariar 2* and *Ikaruga*, so order your copy now.

JANUARY '05

Sonic Mega Collection Plus

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC
Already available on the GameCube, *Sonic Mega Collection Plus* will give Xbox and PlayStation2 owners even more hedgehog-based titles.

FEBRUARY '05

Retrovision

Date: 11-14 Feb **Location:** The George Hotel, Frome, Somerset
Price: £10-£25
Next year's Retrovision is looking like being yet another four days of classic gaming. Competitions will be held on the likes of the Dreamcast, Commodore 64 and the Vic20. There'll be plenty of traders and stalls and you can guarantee that there'll be loads of retro games to play. You may even see Jeff Minter hanging around…

JULY '05

GCE UK

Date: 30-31 July **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA
After the success of this year's event, we've been told that another GCE is now a guaranteed certainty. Little is known about who will be opening the event, but it looks like GCE UK is keen to get hold of Dominik Diamond

AUGUST '05

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)

Date: TBA (US) **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA
Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can guarantee that 2005's event will be even better.

SEPTEMBER '05

Jagfest '05

Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA
Details are still sketchy, but we know that Jagfest UK will be returning next year. The event has been running for several years now and has been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk

CLASSIC LOADING SCREENS

NO 2: GEMINI WING

We were huge fans of Tecmo's quirky scrolling shoot-'em-up and played it down the local arcade whenever we got a chance. While the home computer versions were rather poor and lacked the magic of the arcade original, the Spectrum version at least had this funky loading screen.



Website Of The Month

Scouring the internet for retro goodness can be tough, so we'll find it for you. This issue we look at Damien McFerran's homage to one of the best magazines ever…

***Mean Machines* was one of the greatest multiformat magazines ever created, and this site is a great tribute.** Originally a section in *CVG*, *Mean Machines* became so popular that it spawned its own magazine that ran for two years before it was split into two new mags (*Mean Machines Sega* and *Official Nintendo Magazine*).

Although it's still being worked on, the site is looking very promising and features a wealth of information that will have fans of Mean Yob wetting themselves. There's an extensive history of the magazine, a look at the *Mean Machines* staff and what they're now up to, as well as a breakdown of every issue of the mag. Go misty eyed at http://members.lycos.co.uk/duddyroar/



Fanzine Corner

We track down the best retro fanzines – this month we browse through the excellent Retro Review



Although it's only five issues old, *Retro Review* is already a huge favourite with retro fans. Created by Ian Gledhill and Jorge Canelhas, *Retro Review* covers a variety of interesting topics in each issue. Whether you're wondering how to make your own emulator, interested in starting up an arcade collection, or just want to read some great interviews, you'll find *Retro Review* sates all your retro needs.

Each issue has an impressive 60 pages and often features in-depth articles that are spread over several issues. Considering the size of *Retro Review*, it's impressive that it only costs £2.50, or you can buy a year's subscription (six issues, plus one issue free) for just £15. It might be slightly more expensive than some fanzines but the quality makes *Retro Review* a great buy.

THE £50 CHALLENGE

It's amazing what you can find for the price of a new game nowadays, so each issue we'll be looking around for retro bargains and displaying our finds

If you're a savvy collector, you'll realise that bargains can turn up in all sorts of unexpected places. We were ambling through the back streets of Boscombe in Bournemouth not so long ago (looking for games, of course) and after having no joy at my usual haunts we decided to cast our net a bit further. We found a second-hand record shop selling PlayStation games. Interest piqued, we went inside…

Looking through the piles of battered *Tomb Raider* and *Demolition Derby* cases, we stumbled across *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. Hands trembling, we looked inside to see if it still had all the relevant extras (it did) and then asked for a price. Now, £20 may seem like a great price for something that goes for over £60 on eBay, but we were determined to haggle. In the end we walked away with a rare game for just £14. Not bad.



Your Game

Choose your favourite old-school arcade classic

Unhappy because we haven't covered your favourite game yet? Don't despair, every month you'll be able to vote for the title you'd like to see in our 'Greatest Retro Game Ever' feature. We'll give you a list of choices and you'll have three votes. Your first choice will net five points, second will receive three, while the last will get one. You can vote by emailing darranj@paragon.co.uk, or head over to www.gamestm.co.uk.

- Mr Do
- Space Invaders
- Pac-Man
- Galaxian





- Space Panic
- Centipede
- Defender
- Missile Command



STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

After last month's 'Why don't they remake Dizzy?' feature, we were able to get hold of Philip Oliver and find out if our favourite ovoid will ever appear in a videogame again.

games™: What's stopping you from releasing a new Dizzy game?

PO: Dizzy was and still is a really popular character and we've thought about bringing him back on the new consoles to a whole new generation on a few occasions. We even went so far as to put a teaser video on www.fantasticdizzy.com to gauge people's reaction on seeing how Dizzy would look in a full 3D environment, and the feedback was very positive. Some fans got really excited, thinking it was an actual game already in development, but we only wanted to see what people thought of the idea. There are other issues to take into consideration as well, such as the fact that we currently share the rights to Dizzy with Codemasters. There have been talks about a comeback, but nothing has been finalised so far.

games™: Do you think the public would still be interested in Dizzy?

PO: Judging from the response we had to the *Dizzy* trailer we put on the website, then yes. It seems that there is a lot of interest still surrounding Dizzy; we still get fan mail even now all these years later asking when he might be coming back, and when we go and do our university lectures the students often ask us questions about him. This always surprises us, because we don't expect students to be old enough to remember the *Dizzy* games.

games™: Would you keep a new Dizzy game in 2D, perhaps for a GBA version?

PO: If *Dizzy* were to be remade into a new title then we always thought it would be a 3D adventure on the consoles, although with the new handhelds coming out it could be a 3D adventure on them as well. All the characters from that retro period have made the transition to 3D and we always thought Dizzy would be no different if he was to return. It gives you so much more scope for the gameplay and the environments.

games™: So does that mean Dizzy will definitely be back?

PO: Will Dizzy return? Never say never…

CLASH OF THE TITANS

R.O.A.D.B.L.A.S.T.E.R.S



As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month, we take the 8-bit computer versions of *RoadBlasters* for a test drive.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64 visuals are nice and chunky and make a brave attempt at capturing the spirit of the original arcade game; the layered roadside makes a reasonable attempt at conveying the death-defying speeds of the arcade original, but it still lacks any adrenaline rush. It's a decent enough conversion, but we've seen better.

SPECTRUM: While the Spectrum's visuals are extremely detailed and look reasonably close to their arcade counterparts, the monochromatic display brings the whole package down. But the biggest fault with the Spectrum version is its lack of speed and, as a result, one of the key aspects that made the arcade game so much fun has been lost.

AMSTRAD: Previous driving games on the CPC 464 have suffered a distinct lack of speed that undermines the whole point of a racing title. Luckily, *RoadBlasters* looks extremely slick. Add some bright, well-detailed visuals that capture the game's arcade parent and the Amstrad takes an early lead.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: C64

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Although not the best score David Whittaker has coded, it's surprisingly upbeat, features plenty of bass and perfectly complements the game. However, the in-game effects are quite harsh on the ears and the lack of any music to listen to while racing is disappointing. Still, a sterling effort.

SPECTRUM: While the 128k version of *RoadBlasters* has the same soundtrack as the C64 and CPC 464 versions, it sounds a lot tinnier. As bad as the soundtrack may be, though, nothing prepares you for the horror that greets your ears when you play the game… The constant engine drone is horrific and the spot effects aren't any better either.

AMSTRAD: Although this sounds much better than the Spectrum's woeful effort, it can't match the thumping bass that the C64 version offers. Spot effects are surprisingly solid and even the continuous engine noise doesn't grate too much.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: An absolute shambles. Your car slides around like it's on an ice rink and the slightest of touches causes you to lurch all over the place. Collision detection is reasonably good, but the stodgy controls, over-sensitive steering and unfair difficulty level soon put a damper on things.

SPECTRUM: Controls are much tighter than the C64 version, so your car is much more responsive. Problems do arise when you take tight corners at high speed (the game practically slows to a crawl) but it's a problem that's in all three versions. Even the collision detection is very impressive, making the Spectrum a strong contender for first place.

AMSTRAD: While the controls aren't as sensitive as those on the C64, they lack the tightness of the Spectrum conversion. Collision detection, while decent, is less fair than the Spectrum, but it's still reasonably playable.

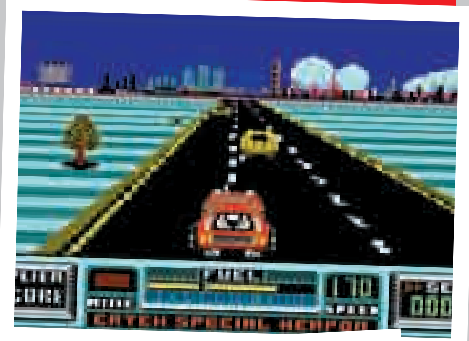
WINNER: SPECTRUM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

AND THE WINNER IS…



Amstrad

Like many titles of the time, it was always going to be tough converting *RoadBlasters* to the 8-bit formats, but US Gold had reasonable success with the Amstrad and Spectrum conversions. Although we wouldn't normally choose aesthetics over gameplay, the Amstrad version did feature in all three categories as either the winner or runner up, so it's a unanimous win for Alan Sugar's machine.







ROADBLASTERS (Various Home Systems) US Gold, 1988 – UK Advertisement

RETRO GOES TO THE MOVIES

The popcorn's popping, we've got a super-sized Coke to see us through the night and our trigger finger's itching to play some games…

Loathe 'em or, well, loathe 'em, film licences have been a staple of the videogame market for what feels like an eternity. The draw of playing your favourite big-screen hero has always had a certain allure, and developers have been quick to act on it. When we were at school, there were often arguments about who got to play Han Solo or James Bond, so being able to actually 'be' them on your TV screen is a strong selling point for games – even if they're not all that good.

The majority of movie licences have been complete turkeys and for every classic like *GoldenEye* or *Star Wars*, you'll have five or six duds that go by the name of *Predator*, *Cobra* or *Mission: Impossible*.

Many publishers seem content to see their games rest on the laurels of whatever licence they're based on, or perhaps the vast amount of money spent on securing the licence in the first place means that there's little left to go towards actual game development.

In our minds, film licences work best when the game expands on the existing ethos of the film, rather than when it's turned into just another generic shoot-and-kick action adventure. It's a stumbling block that far too many developers fall foul of and is perfectly illustrated by the amount of average film licences that Ocean churned out in the mid-Eighties and early Nineties. Despite producing a few gems, many of its film licences were generic in the extreme and were often identical in layout to some of its previous games.

Fortunately though, there are plenty of great retro film licences out there and it's these that we'll be honouring over the next four pages. And then, after that, we look at the worst…





▲ Movie licences have traditionally struck an unhappy medium – too bad for film fans, too bad for gamers. But there are a few exceptions. A few…

GOLDENEYE

Developer: Rare
Format: N64
Release: 1997

This is without a doubt the finest film licence we've ever played. While it hasn't aged particularly well, Rare's *GoldenEye* not only showed us how a film licence should be used in a game, but set the benchmark by which all future first-person shooters were judged (at least until *Halo* came along).

James Bond has always been a popular videogame character but this was the first time that you actually felt like you were playing the debonair spy – Rare had used every trick in the book to ensure that your experience was as realistic as possible. Watch the first few scenes from the film and it's amazing how well they were been captured on the trusty N64. Each level felt instantly familiar and you soon became immersed in the game's excellent atmosphere.

The great thing about *GoldenEye*, though, is that it would have still been a fantastic game without the Bond licence. A masterful control system, fantastic selection of weapons and plenty of varied missions ensured that nothing could touch it in the single-player stakes. However, it was the multiplayer mode that really grabbed the public's attention and for many *GoldenEye* remains a classic if you're a Bond fan or not.



▲ With all its connotations of 'being' James Bond, *GoldenEye* was a great use of a licence. And the game itself was pretty awesome too, which is a bonus.



ROBOCOP

Developer: Ocean
Format: Various Home Systems
Release: 1989

Ocean's film licences always worked best when they strayed away from the simple 'walk along a level and shoot everything that moves' design and *Robocop* was a perfect example. It may have still had the scrolling levels that had become Ocean's trademark, but the production values had been suitably enhanced.

For one thing the game looked lovely, with the 8-bit titles being particularly impressive. All versions featured chunky, well-animated sprites and plenty of detail that captured the style of the film. While the Spectrum version lacked the colour of its 8-bit peers, it's easily one of the strongest looking licences that the humble Speccy has ever produced. Audio was also of a very high quality with all versions of the game featuring a great haunting tune and (when applicable) some above-average digitised speech.

No doubt aware of the criticism past titles had received, Ocean added plenty of variety to ensure that your brain as well as your trigger finger was suitably taxed. Our favourite section saw you trying to piece together Clarence Boddiker's features from a selection of face parts, but all mini-games were a welcome break from the run-and-gun action.

DIE HARD TRILOGY

Developer: Probe Entertainment
Format: Saturn/PSone
Release: 1996

Back when *Die Hard Trilogy* came out for the PSone, the idea of having multiple genres of gameplay in a single game was a pretty new concept, which is why this title was so different from every other film-licensed game. Being split into three distinct sections, one representing each of the movies, meant that the game offered three very different experiences, some of which were more enjoyable than others.

The weakest of the three was certainly the third-person shoot-'em-up based on the first film; starting on the ground floor of the Nakatomi Plaza, you had to work your way up through the building shooting terrorists, saving hostages and defusing bombs. It wasn't unenjoyable – just a bit simple. As you moved onto the other sections, though, the quality improved.

The second film had been transformed into a lightgun blaster similar to *Virtua Cop*, with numerous locations taken from the movie; not only did you have to blast the terrorists without killing innocent people, but you could also destroy the scenery in the process.

However, it was the free-roaming driving sections based upon the third film that really stole the show and offered some superbly exciting gameplay as you sped around, trying to defuse various bombs along the way.



Alone, each game would have been a fair example of a film-to-game conversion, but together they made for an extremely strong and varied package.

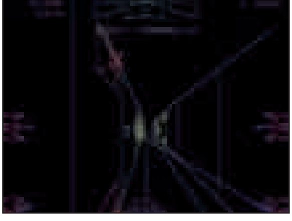
STAR WARS

Developer: Atari
Format: Arcade
Release: 1983

George Lucas's *Star Wars* films have received more videogame conversions than any other film licence. Some, like *Knights Of The Old Republic*, *X-Wing* and *Super Star Wars*, have been superb, while the likes of *Rebel Assault* and *Masters Of Teräs Käsi* have smelled worse than a pile of Banther poodoo. For the moment, though, we're going to focus on Atari's wireframe classic that hit the arcades in 1983.

Available in both stand-up and sit-down versions, *Star Wars* saw you playing as Luke Skywalker and re-enacted the classic assault on the Death Star. Thanks to the timeless soundtrack and massive amounts of speech, you were quickly thrown into the *Star Wars* universe and soon became utterly engrossed in the simple yet addictive gameplay. The first wave of the game saw you trying to take down as many TIE Fighters as possible, while the second stage saw your taking out various blocks and towers on the surface of the Death Star.

Eventually, you got to fly down the vital trench itself, dodging fireballs and hastily constructed barriers until you were able to finally blow up the Death Star and start the whole process again. Fantastic.



▲ What's the betting George Lucas wants to replace this with a 'special' edition too?

GHOSTBUSTERS

Developer: Activision
Format: Various Home Systems
Release: 1984

First released on the Commodore 64 and featuring a great rendition of Ray Parker Jr's theme tune, *Ghostbusters* is another great movie licence that ate up way too much of our free time.

Starting off with $10,000 your first task was to fit out your Ectomobile with ghost-detecting apparatus in order to make your job a bit easier. Once your vehicle was all tooled-up you could take to the streets of New York and start looking for those pesky spirits.

As you travelled around the city, red flashing lights indicated hidden ghosts and the screen would cut to a view above your car as you raced towards the stricken building. As you made your way around town, it was possible to suck up any stray ghosts to raise your credit rating.

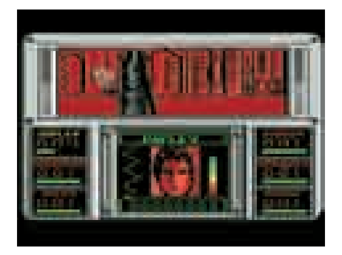
Once you made your way to the possessed building, the game switched to a side-on view and saw you trying to trap the troublesome spook before he could escape. Your final goal was to make it to the Temple of Zuul and save the day – just watch out for that Sta-Puft Man.

It may have had rather ropey visuals, but *Ghostbusters* has an enduring quality that still makes it fun to play today.



ALIENS

Developer: Electric Dreams
Format: C64/Spectrum
Release: 1987



Two *Aliens* games were released on the 8-bit formats, but the version by Electric Dreams was far superior and convincingly captured the terror of going up against one of cinema's most memorable monsters.

Taking control of six characters (including Ellen Ripley and Bishop the android) your aim was to infiltrate a complex set up by colonists to see if any of them were still alive. All the action was displayed via your Mobile Tactical Operations Bay (MTOB) and the viewing screen gave you a first-hand view of whatever character you were currently connected to. By using this first-person viewpoint, Electric Dreams created a tremendous amount of atmosphere that perfectly conveyed the tension and horror of the film.

A quick press of various keys enabled you to switch between all six characters and you were even able to give them (limited) commands that would be carried out as soon as you switched to another person. While the sound effects were rather limited, they were expertly used and generated huge amounts of tension, especially when an Alien was about to attack. A low hum would be your only warning that a Xenomorph was on the loose, and quick reactions and a steady trigger finger were needed in order to defeat them. Gripping stuff.

THE UNTOUCHABLES

Developer: Ocean
Format: Various Home Systems
Release: 1989

By far the most ambitious of Ocean's licensed games was *The Untouchables*. Based on the excellent Brian De Palma flick, *The Untouchables* included plenty of different gameplay elements to ensure that the player never got bored.

Starting off with a side-scrolling run-and-gun level that saw you madly dashing backwards and forwards through a vast warehouse in search of evidence, the levels just got better and better (we could even forgive it being a multi-loader).

While many of the stages were based around *Operation Wolf* or past Ocean licences, they were done with such style that you couldn't help but be impressed. Best of all was Ocean's masterful capturing of the best part of the movie – the excellent homage to the Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (you know, the bit with the, er, steps).

Taking control of Eliot Ness, you had to guide a runaway pram to safety while taking out as many bad guys as possible. Numerous health icons appeared throughout the sequence and you'd find yourself pushing the pram over them to ensure its passenger survived. It perfectly captured a great cinematic moment and is the crowning achievement of a top movie licence.



▲ "He sends one of yours to the hospital, you unplug his controller and stuff it down his neck."

BATMAN



Developer: Ocean
Format: Amiga
Release: 1989

Along with *Shadow Of The Beast*, Ocean's interpretation of Tim Burton's *Batman* was one of the first titles to convince gamers that an Amiga was really worth owning. Featuring amazing visuals and a barnstorming score, it looked like nothing else around and was poles apart from its C64 brother.

Although the platform levels were little more than enhanced versions of those seen on the Commodore 64, it was the superb driving sections that really wowed gamers and convinced them that the Amiga was the must-have gaming system.

Taking control of either the Batmobile or the Batwing, the game saw you flying through the streets (and later the skies) of Gotham at ridiculously high speeds that made your jaw drop. Should a turn prove too difficult to take in the Batmobile, you could fire out a hook and attach it to a nearby lamppost, thus making the bend easier to negotiate.

Add in a puzzle game that was very similar to the old boardgame version of *Mastermind* and it was quite clear that Ocean had left no stone unturned to deliver the definitive home licence. Ocean may be responsible for churning out some of the most generic pap imaginable, but when it wanted to, it could deliver some real classics. *Batman* was one such game.

ALIEN³

Developer: Probe Software
Format: SNES
Release: 1993

Although *Alien³* appeared on various formats including the Mega Drive and the Commodore 64, it's the great SNES version that's made it into our top ten.

Where its peers were simple (but admittedly very good) run-and-gun clones, the SNES outing offered brains as well as brawns. Ripley had a massive amount of tasks to complete, which added plenty of variety and ensured massive longevity over the pretty but rather limited Mega Drive conversion.

Rescuing captured prisoners, sealing off overrun areas and fixing broken pipes were just a few of the challenges you had to face and they added variety to an already solid game. To make your tasks more difficult the prison was infested with an incredible amount of Xenomorphs. Needless to say, great care had to be taken to ensure you didn't meet a sticky end.

Fortunately, Ripley had a large amount of weapons to choose from (whereas in the film she only had her frightening bald head) but our favourite was definitely the flamethrower – mmm, toasted Alien… Although Probe could be criticised for moving away from the spirit of the film, gamers who were disappointed with the movie's single acidic-blooded foe at least had their hands full in the game.

Fantastic visuals and some incredibly creepy music finished off a great package and makes *Alien³* well worth checking out.



▲ Ripley was impressed with new 'extra strength' Raid. Goodbye, troublesome bugs and aliens.

JURASSIC PARK



Developer: Ocean
Format: SNES/Amiga
Release: 1996

Like *Alien³*, *Jurassic Park* was another title that was specifically tailored for each host machine. Forget about the woefully inept Mega Drive version that saw you controlling either Alan Grant or a Velociraptor, the SNES and Amiga versions were the titles to go for (although the Mega CD game was pretty good as well).

Taking control of Alan Grant, you had a huge variety of goals to meet and a park crawling with cloned dinosaurs to negotiate. Radioing for help, destroying Raptor nests and clearing a dinosaur-infested ship were just a few of the obstacles you had to overcome, and that was without worrying about the massive T-Rex that was on the loose…

While the top-down sections of the game were extremely detailed and well-animated, it was the first-person sections that really made *Jurassic Park* stand out from other film licences of the time. Upon entering the park's many buildings, the game took on a first-person perspective and saw you trying to hunt out guns, keys and even night vision goggles in a bid to reach safety. Avoid each building's Raptors and you could move on to unlock even more of the park. It might feel a little old hat now, but at the time nothing else came close.

SCRAPING THE BARREL

For every great film licence, the shelves are stacked with seven or eight complete duffers. Don't believe us? Walk into your local games emporium and see for yourself – it really is quite worrying. Sadly, it's something we've had to put up with for years, and the likes of *Van Helsing, The Scorpion King* and *Catwoman* are perfect proof that the situation isn't likely to change any time soon. We may be living in an age of fantastic visuals and superb sound, but the gameplay in many of today's licences is no more enjoyable than what we were force-fed 20 years ago. However, it's the past we're currently interested in, and as we've given you a selection of our favourites, let's look at some of the worst licences we could force ourselves to replay. We warn you, though, it's not going to be pretty…



▲ Don't look at this picture longer than you have to – you'll only encourage them. Go on, move along now.

FANTASIA

Developer: Infogrames
Format: Mega Drive
Release: 1991

Mickey Mouse And The Castle Of Illusion was an instant classic when it appeared on the Mega Drive. Gorgeous visuals, great music and fantastic gameplay all combined to create an absolute gem. So what the hell happened with *Fantasia*?

While it had some lovely visuals the game had been saddled with horrendous music and some of the worst controls we've ever seen in a Mega Drive title. Mickey took ages to respond to your commands and collision detection throughout the game was disgraceful.

Perhaps the biggest problem with the game was its horrific rendition of the film's classical soundtrack. Kudos to Sega for remembering to use the relevant pieces of music, but the Mega Drive simply wasn't up to the task and delivered a series of offensive noises that no doubt had all the original composers spinning in their graves. *Fantasia* was a crushing disappointment and the perfect example of a poor film licence.



▲ All the Disney magic in the world couldn't stop *Fantasia* grinding to a halt on the Mega Drive.

A VIEW TO KILL

Developer: Domark
Format: Various
Release: 1985

Like the *Star Wars* licence, the James Bond franchise has also suffered from its own share of poor game titles and *A View To A Kill* is one of the worst examples.

While Domark attempted to keep the game fresh by giving it three distinct gameplay styles, they were all terribly tedious and lacked any excitement. There might have been plenty of variety – running through mines, driving cars through tight city streets – but the lack of gameplay totally ruined a potentially great title.

The first level was horribly bugged and it was possible to simply take a lift through the entire stage, eventually leaving the game area completely and subsequently dying as a result. The later stages didn't get any better and special mention has to go to the piss-poor car chase that saw your car bouncing off brick walls like it was made of rubber. It was incredibly easy to get stuck on corners or against other cars and it soon became obvious that this was yet another licence that was rushed out to cash in on the film's success.

ET: THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL

Developer: Atari
Format: Atari 2600
Release: 1982

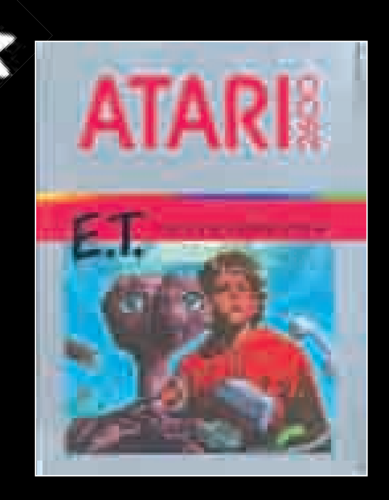
Although not the worst title ever released for the Atari 2600, we can safely say that this is one of the worst film licences we've ever had the misfortune to play.

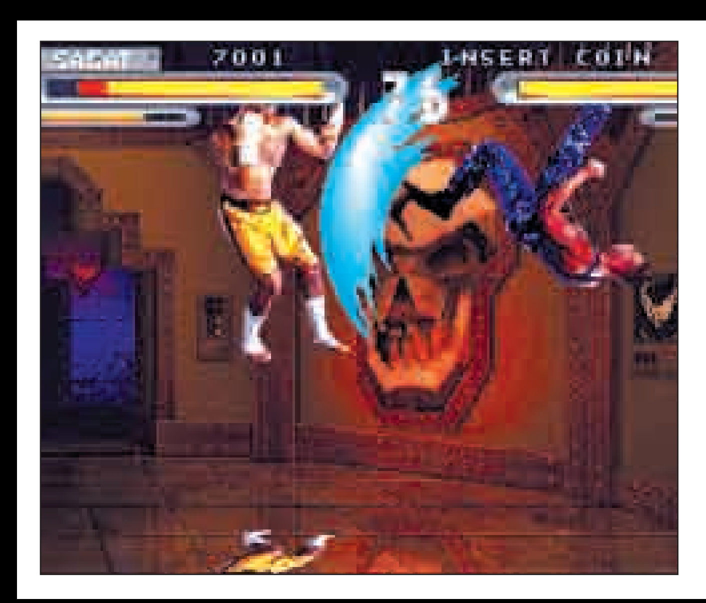
Taking control of ET, you had to search out three missing items so that you could rebuild your phone and eventually return home. Along the way you had to avoid FBI agents and doctors, as well as the incredibly frustrating pits that were littered throughout the game.

The in-game graphics were extremely poor and it was clear that Atari had simply rushed the game out in order to meet its Christmas release date. But for all its shoddy visuals and ropey animation, it was the incredibly frustrating and unfair gameplay that proved the real killer.

There were a stupid amount of pits dotted around and the poor controls meant it was incredibly difficult to avoid falling into them. It wouldn't have been so bad if they were easy to climb out of, but Atari made it so frustrating that it was easier to turn the game off.

ET: The Extra Terrestrial was so bad that Atari was inundated with returns and eventually buried five million copies in a landfill in New Mexico. The film may have been enchanting, but the game was an absolute dog and thoroughly deserved its final resting place.





STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE

Developer: Capcom
Format: Various
Release: 1995

So, it's a game based upon a film that was based on a game…

Using digitised characters is never a good idea (just look at *Pit Fighter*) but the thought of beating up a digitised version of Jean Claude Van Damme is actually quite appealing. But Capcom dropped a real clanger with *Street Fighter: The Movie* and managed to produce a title that was nothing like the superior game that had been the inspiration for the film.

The biggest problems were with the characters; each was incredibly stilted and jerky and lacked the graceful animation of their *Street Fighter II* counterparts. As a result, the game has none of the polish that had made its predecessors such a joy to play and it inevitably started to collect dust on the shelves of those who thought they were buying a great game.

Although it first appeared in arcades, home conversions followed, but they were all as dire as the original. Granted, it was better on the Saturn (due to its joypad) but that wasn't enough to justify a purchase.

STAR WARS: MASTERS OF TERÄS KÄSI

Developer: LucasArts
Format: PlayStation
Release: 1998

With so many *Star Wars* titles released in the last 22 years, it's inevitable that there'll be a few stinkers. But nothing could prepare us for the horror that was *Masters Of Teräs Käsi*.

The idea of a 3D fighter may have sounded good on paper, but its execution was a complete shambles and, along with *Super Bombad Racing*, it's one of the worst *Star Wars* games that we've played.

We won't lie that we weren't excited about playing the likes of Boba Fett, Darth Vader or Han Solo, but spending time with *Teräs Käsi* was another matter entirely. While the stages captured the film locations, the characters were poorly animated and looked very dated.

The biggest problem, though, was with how the game actually played. Battles felt like you were fighting against some invisible force (no pun intended) so games were sluggish and lacked any excitement.

We still feel there's room for a *Star Wars* beat-'em-up, but it clearly isn't *Masters Of Teräs Käsi*.





VIRTUAL BOY

A NINTENDO CONSOLE THAT WAS A COMPLETE FAILURE? GET OUT OF TOWN…

Classic Machine

Nintendo must have thought it was onto a winner with its Virtual Boy – after all, here was a console that was the brainchild of legendary creator Gunpei Yokoi. Yokoi-san had already designed the likes of the Game & Watch and the incredibly popular Game Boy, so having such an inventive individual at the helm of a system that was as innovative as the Virtual Boy must have seemed like a guarantee of success. The system promised to offer the world's first three-dimensional gaming experience, so it's no wonder there was plenty of gossip surrounding the new machine.

Speculation about the Virtual Boy (or VR 32 as it was initially known) began in the spring of 1994, and by the time the machine made its debut at the Shoshinkai Exhibition in Japan in November that year the anticipation was unbelievable. The Virtual Boy was set to revolutionise the way games were played and Nintendo was keen to promote its 3D capabilities. Indeed, speculation about the machine became so great that at one stage people were expecting it to project 3D images into the air above it. Needless to say, when the machine arrived it proved to be a bit of a disappointment and not at all as expected.

The Virtual Boy's 3D images were produced by two high-resolution mirror-scanning LED displays – to see them you had to stare directly into the Virtual Boy's binocular-like headset. Games were shown in various shades of red (which helped enhance the resolution) on a black background. While it was unlike anything before it (like the Vectrex, it remains unique) and still looks rather impressive today, critics at Shoshinkai were not convinced.

ON THE MARKET

However, when the Virtual Boy was shown to consumers at that year's Consumer Electronics Show, interest in Nintendo's machine started to pick up. The likes of *Galactic Pinball* and *Teleroboxer*, as well as several impressive looking demos, were starting to show people just how different the Virtual Boy would be, while several developers (including T&E Soft and Hudson) pledged their commitment to the machine and announced several titles that would appear in 1995. By the summer of 1995 many more titles – including *V1-Tetris*, *Waterworld*, *Vertical Force* and *Mario's Dream Tennis* (eventually known as *Mario's Tennis*) – were unveiled and

SPECIFICATIONS

PROCESSOR: 32-bit RISC processor running at 20 MHz
RAM: 1Mb DRAM 512Kb P-SRAM
POWER: 6 AA Batteries (9VDC) or AC Adaptor (10VDC)
COLOURS: 4 colours / 32 intensity levels
DIMENSIONS: 8.5″(h) x 10″(w) x 4.3″(d)
RESOLUTION: 384 x 224 pixels
SOUND: 16-bit stereo



ONE OF A KIND
It's a shame that so few games were released for Nintendo's console as they really benefitted from the Virtual Boy's unique pad.

CROSS-PLATFORM
Look on the internet and you'll find instructions on how to convert your N64 pad to work on a Virtual Boy. Don't cry if it doesn't work, though…

MMM, COMFY
It might look rather unwieldy, but the Virtual Boy's joypad was really nice to hold. It was heavy, however, as it contained the machine's batteries.





Many gamers were expecting a portable unit, so were a bit surprised when this got released.

WHY I LOVED MY VIRTUAL BOY

Okay, so I only ever managed to buy five games for my Virtual Boy, but it still sits proudly with the rest of my Nintendo collection. Fuelled by all the magazine hype when the machine was first announced, I quickly placed an (expensive) order at my local independent, and while it wasn't exactly what I expected, I was never disappointed. Although it's probably my least played console (I'll only ever use it maybe once a year) I certainly wouldn't sell it. It would be like giving away an arm…

RICK PORTER

VIRTUAL BOY

several of these games were shown at that year's E3.

The Virtual Boy was finally released in Japan on 21 July 1995 and in the US on 14 August, with *Mario's Tennis*, *Galactic Pinball*, *Red Alarm* and *Teleroboxer* all released as launch titles. Almost immediately, though, the system encountered several problems, with the first obstacle being its rather unattractive price. The machine retailed for $179.95 (roughly £100) in America, which many people considered too expensive for a 'portable' system. Despite its unwieldy appearance, many people assumed the Virtual Boy would be a handheld system. It's possible that it was originally intended to be worn as a headset but the final design incorporated a tabletop stand, restricting the machine's portability.

To add to the machine's problems, the Virtual Boy's unique lenses were also very fragile and were prone to failure if they were knocked, handled roughly, or used when there was a lot of motion (in the back of a moving car, for example).

Despite having no real competitors (a fact that helped Nintendo believe the machine would be a success) the Virtual Boy's 32-bit credentials soon set it up against the PlayStation and Saturn; consumers turned to Sega and Sony's machines, perhaps put off by the Virtual Boy's two-colour display and limited number of great games.

OFF THE MARKET

The display also proved problematic after claims that it could cause eyestrain. Many users also complained of headaches, dizziness and other maladies, prompting concerns about the machine's safety. Nintendo was forced to put a label on the Virtual Boy stating that under-sevens shouldn't use it, and it advised against playing for long periods. Hardly good for the system's image.

The majority of the blame, though, came down to Nintendo. Worried that third-party companies wouldn't deliver quality titles, Nintendo began to clamp down on the amount of developers that were allowed to produce games for the machine. The Virtual Boy also suffered from extremely poor marketing and it was a good six months after the machine was released that Nintendo started releasing adverts that showed images of the actual games.

Another, perhaps tenuous, factor in the Virtual Boy's failure is the fact that Shigeru Miyamoto was not involved with the console at any stage. Hard at work on the Ultra 64 (later the N64), Mario's creator simply couldn't spare the time to create any games for the new machine and the Virtual Boy remains Nintendo's only console to not be graced by the magic touch of Miyamoto-san.

Unsurprisingly, the Virtual Boy didn't reach anywhere near its predicted sales figures of 3 million units and although a re-launch was prepared (and was rumoured to include popular Nintendo franchises), by August 1996 Nintendo officially announced that no more games would be released for the system – the Virtual Boy was dead. Only 21 games were released for the Virtual Boy in Japan (just 14 in the US) and it remains Nintendo's only hardware failure. Following the machine's demise, Yokoi-san resigned.

Despite its shortcomings, though, the Virtual Boy still has a loyal fan base and is easily available from the likes of eBay and independent import stores. If you're looking for something a bit different, or simply want to know that even the mighty Nintendo isn't infallible, why not hunt the Virtual Boy down? You may be pleasantly surprised with what you find.

GAME ON

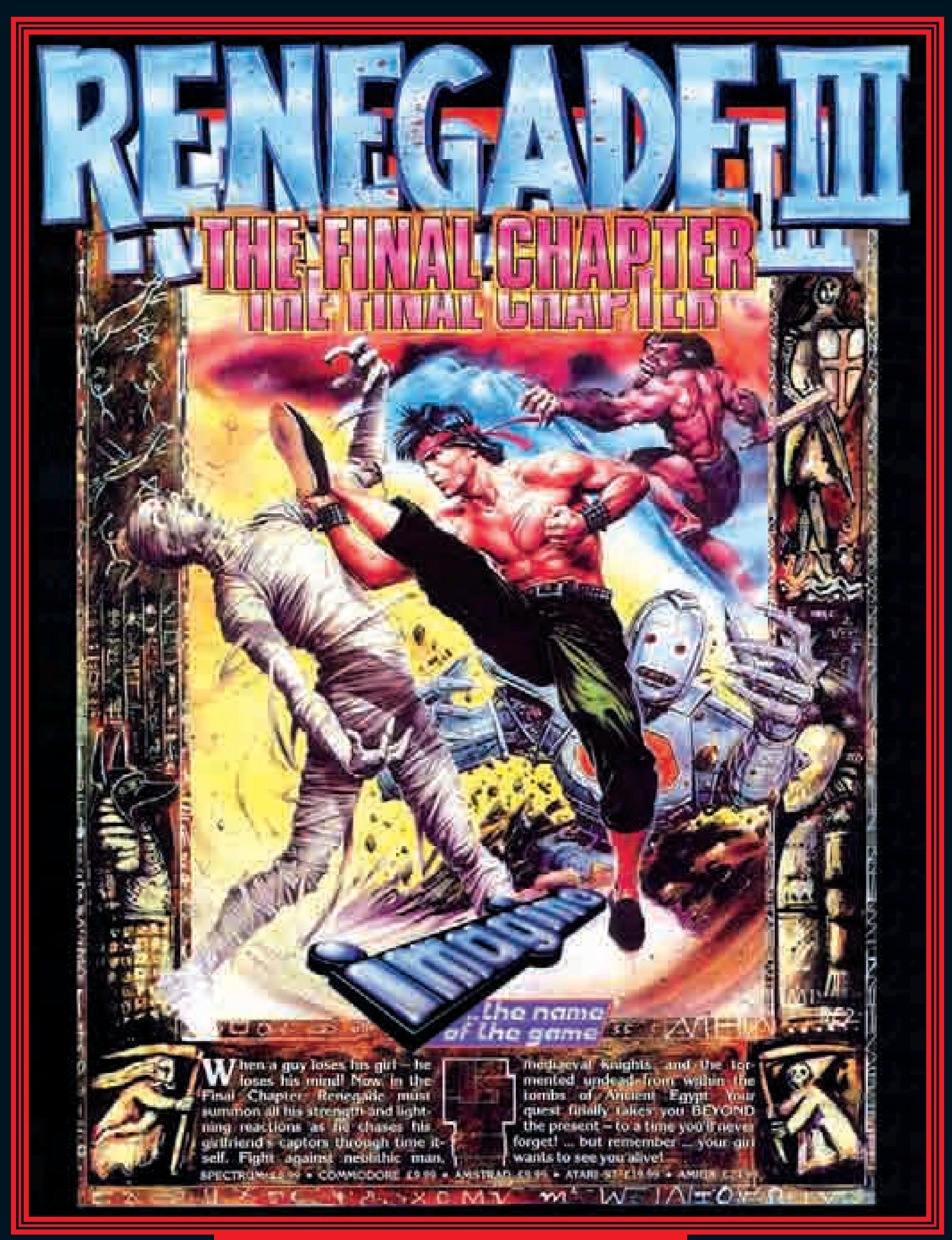
The Virtual Boy's catalogue of games was pretty slim but there were still a few choice titles that were well worth playing on Nintendo's ill-fated console. *Mario's Tennis* not only played a surprisingly tight game of everyone's favourite lawn sport, but also featured some extremely tasty 3D effects. The Virtual Boy gave the game an amazing sense of depth and it still looks great today; you'll even find yourself turning to reach a ball that's sailed past you – very impressive. *Mario Clash* was another title that fully showed off the capabilities of Nintendo's machine. Based on the original *Mario Bros* arcade title (although it originally looked more like *Super Mario World*) it was another title that featured some great 3D effects. *Panic Bomber*, on the other hand, may not have fully exploited the machine's three-dimensional capabilities, but it did feature some excellent playability and smooth controls and was one of the better third-party titles released for the machine.



▲ When you look at it like this, the Virtual Boy looks like one of those View-Master toys with the slides.



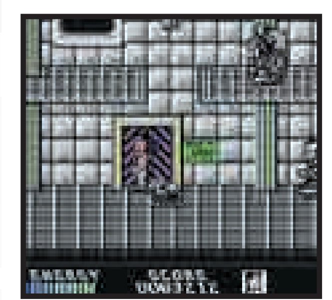
▲ It's amazing the Virtual Boy lasted even as long as it did, considering the amount of things going against it: no games, no Miyamoto, no third-party support…



RENEGADE III (Imagine) Various Home Systems, 1989 – UK Advertisement



THE BASTARD SON OF...



RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BOUGHT THE SEQUEL TO A GREAT GAME ONLY TO FIND THAT IT'S RUBBISH? ALTHOUGH MANY FRANCHISES BECAME STALE WITH AGE, EVERY NOW AND THEN A SEQUEL GOT RELEASED THAT TRULY SHOCKED US WITH ITS MEDIOCRITY. WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT SOME OF THE WORST FOLLOW-UPS EVER, STARTING WITH IMAGINE'S RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER…

Release: 1989
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Imagine
Developer: In-House

T*arget Renegade* is widely regarded as one of the greatest beat-'em-ups available for the 8-bit computers. Its unique blend of cartoon visuals and graphic violence (not to mention a superb two-player mode) made it an essential purchase.

Imagine our shock and horror, then, when we eventually got hold of *Renegade III: The Final Chapter* and found it to be one of the worst games we've ever played. Suspension of disbelief is always necessary in videogames, but the thought of your hardened renegade having to make his way through different time zones was asking just a little too much, even for us.

Starting off in a prehistoric zone, complete with club-wielding cavemen and pugilistic dinosaurs, you later found yourself travelling through even more outlandish stages in an attempt to rescue your kidnapped girlfriend. The Egyptian stage featured mummies of various shapes and sizes, Medieval Zone had vicious dragons and hobbyhorse-mounted knights, while the final future level saw you battling your way through a variety of robots and some deadly flying saucers. Variety may well be the spice of life, but while the levels themselves featured plenty of detail, defeating their inhabitants was another matter entirely…

Renegade III had some of the worst collision detection we've ever seen. Hitting and avoiding enemies became an extremely frustrating prospect and you soon learnt that it was better to simply avoid foes rather than actually face them – not the ideal solution for a flick-screen beat-'em-up by any means. Get to certain stages of each level, though, and a dust-up was inevitable, as you needed to finish off several waves of enemies before you could proceed. Stodgy controls, a limited selection of moves and that godawful collision detection all combined to create some of the most soul-destroying moments we've ever encountered, and that was before you even took into account the ridiculously strict time limit that the game imposed.



▲ So this is the Egyptian Zone, is it? Well, that's just lovely. Can we go now, please?



▲ Beating up T-Rexes was always going to be easy because of their puny little arms. No contest.



Six minutes might sound like ample time to finish a stage, but the mass fights you had to wade through meant that many gamers never even made it off the first stage, let alone the final level. Indeed, even the briefest mention of *Renegade III* is enough to cause various members of the team to turn into stuttering empty husks of their former selves.

Perhaps the biggest oversight of *Renegade III*, though, was the lack of a two-player mode. After wowing gamers with *Target Renegade*'s dual-player action, *Renegade III* felt like a massive step backwards and left a rather nasty taste in the mouth. A second fighter would have been perfect to help out with those frantic battles you had to face on each level, so it's a mystery why Imagine decided to drop it.

To be fair, the Spectrum version was a lot more playable than its Amstrad and C64 counterparts (it featured none of the control problems of its 8-bit peers) but it was still a disappointment when compared to *Target Renegade*. Chances are, though, if you were an Amstrad or C64 owner, you'd have been extremely gutted with your purchase and could still be suffering today. We know we are…

NEVER SAW IT COMING

By far the biggest problem in *Renegade III* was its collision detection. Many of the levels had large pits (normally filled with spikes or lava) that needed to be crossed. While it was possible to avoid some by climbing to a higher platform, other times you were left with little choice but to try to clear them. There was nothing worse than sailing across a gap with what looked like half an inch to spare, only to see your tough brawler fall to his knees and die on the other side.



▲ The astonishingly accurate re-creation of medieval life really takes your breath away, doesn't it?

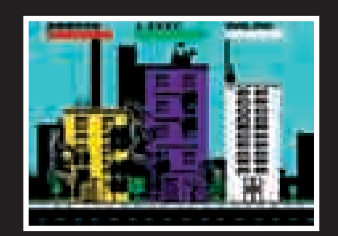
Haven't We Met Before?



Rampage and Ramparts

COULD THIS BE THE LAZIEST RIP-OFF EVER?

Imitation may well be the sincerest form of flattery, but we're pretty sure that Activision was more than a little annoyed when rival developer Go! released *Ramparts* in 1988.



Rampage had proved popular in arcades when Bally Midway released it in 1986 and Activision was quick to snap up the potentially lucrative licence. No sooner had *Rampage* arrived on home computers, Go!'s *Ramparts* was quickly jostling for attention and the similarities between the games were unmistakeable.

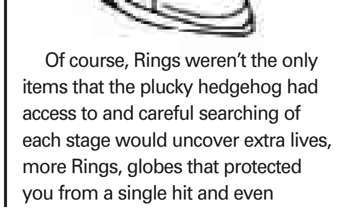
Whereas *Rampage* saw you control giant B-movie monsters, *Ramparts* placed you in the metallic body of a giant knight. In *Rampage* you had to make your way through each city and destroy as many buildings as possible, while avoiding the city's guards who would attack you with tanks and helicopters. *Ramparts*, on the other hand, saw you, er, destroying large castles and avoiding siege cannons and other ancient weaponry. Even the loading screens were extremely similar and if a similar situation had happened today, you can guarantee Go! would have been sued quicker than you could say 'infringement'

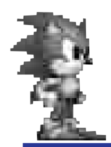
Fortunately for Activision, *Rampage*'s superior visuals and gameplay and a three-player mode revealed *Ramparts* to be nothing more than a quick cash-in.

▼ It's like *Rampage*, but in a medieval setting and therefore completely different, yes? Er, no.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG





We remember the blue hero who revolutionised Sega's Mega Drive

Format: Mega Drive
Release: 1991
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team

Rather like the 20th Century Fox fanfare at the beginning of a *Star Wars* movie, the word 'Sega' cheerfully booming from your TV signals the start of something pretty impressive: *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Yet the speedy blue hedgehog that became an icon for Sega was proof that necessity is the mother of invention.

In 1990 Sega was eager for a strong mascot to help drive Mega Drive sales and held an internal design competition at Sega Japan. After choosing a drawing by artist Maoto Oshima, Sega just needed someone to place the blue insectivore in a fantastic new game. Step forward Yuji Naka. Although the talented young game designer had already worked on several titles like *Space Harrier*, *Black Belt* and the *Phantasy Star* series, this was the first time he had headed his own production. Nevertheless, Hayao Nakayama (Sega's president at the time) was confident in Naka-san's abilities. Teaming up with artist Naoto Ohshima, Naka-san set to work on his new project.

When *Sonic The Hedgehog* was released in June 1991, it immediately became a huge success and was quite unlike anything else on the market (although a whole slew of imitators quickly followed). Mischievously wagging his finger at you from the game's title screen, Sega's spunky new hero really caught your attention and seemed a world away from Nintendo's podgy (and suddenly boring) plumber.

▲ You had to put a stop to Dr Robotnik's end-of-level vehicle-based shenanigans.

Blinding speed was on the blue hedgehog's side and once you'd built up your racing skills it was possible to sail through many of the levels in ridiculously fast times. The unique, abstract worlds simply flew past, and the exhilaration you felt as Sonic passed each checkpoint was unmatched by any other game of the time. Many levels were filled with elaborate loops and twisting tunnels that Sonic would speed through without a second's thought and it all looked simply amazing.

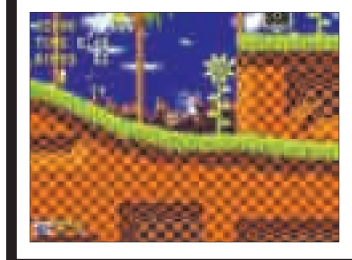
There was more to *Sonic The Hedgehog* than madly racing through levels, though, and your main objective in each zone was to free your animal friends and collect as many gold Rings as possible. The evil Dr Robotnik had stolen the powerful Chaos Emeralds and turned every animal in the game world into a robot; as a result Sonic had to race through six diverse zones (each containing three levels) to save his animal pals.

While even the slightest of brushes with an enemy or a spike would result in instant death, Sonic could prolong his life by collecting the Rings that were scattered throughout each level. Collecting 50 would open up a special bonus stage that Sonic needed to access in order to collect the coveted Chaos Emeralds (collect them all and you got a better ending for the game), while netting yourself a hundred would get you an extra life. Hit an enemy and you'd lose all your hard-earned Rings, although if you were quick it was possible to recapture many of them before they permanently disappeared.

Of course, Rings weren't the only items that the plucky hedgehog had access to and careful searching of each stage would uncover extra lives, more Rings, globes that protected you from a single hit and even

ZONED OUT

Each of *Sonic*'s levels were remarkably different from each other. Green Hill Zone saw the blue hedgehog racing through gorgeous tropical scenery; Marble Zone had Sonic speeding through ancient ruins that were filled with some extremely dangerous lava; while Spring Yard Zone was essentially a massive pinball table that required great patience to get through. Reach stage four and you suddenly found yourself in the gorgeous Labyrinth Zone – the majority of this stage took place under water and as Sonic couldn't swim he moved a lot slower. To stop him from drowning you had to seek out air bubbles so he could top up his limited air supply. Star Light Zone was littered with giant fans, self-destructing bombs and massive springboards and seriously started to increase the game's difficulty factor, while Scrap Brain Zone's many traps and enemies simply had us in tears.





▲ Sonic was fast but he didn't always travel to the places you wanted him to.



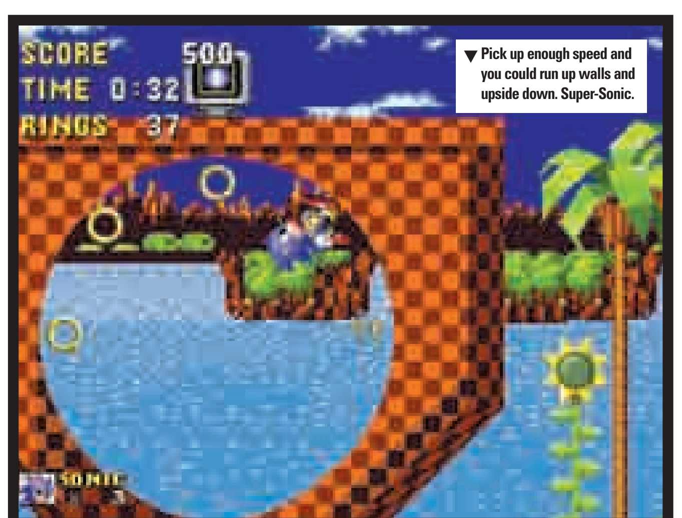
▲ The underwater levels were a bit of a pain – Sonic moved much more slowly and you had to remember to top up your air supply or Sonic would turn even more blue…

invulnerability. Best of all, though, were the nifty red shoes you could pick up. Sonic was already hyperfast, but his new footwear sent the blue critter into overdrive and if you weren't careful it was incredibly easy to lose one of your precious lives.

Get to the end of each zone's first two stages in one piece and, providing you had enough Rings, you could access the level's bonus room and try to grab one of those Chaos Emeralds. While these bonus rounds were easily the most impressive aspect of the game (you were thrown into a maze that rotated around you while you tried to track down the Emerald) the later stages became incredibly frustrating to complete and it was unsurprising that Sega replaced them in the sequel. But completing these rounds was the only way to earn continues, so if you wanted to get deeper into the game it was necessary to play them.

To complement its blinding speed, *Sonic The Hedgehog* featured impressive visuals, stylish character design and a selection of cracking tunes – indeed, the game's critics argued that *Sonic* was a classic case of style over substance. The game's superb level design soon proved this theory untrue, though. While it was possible to simply race through the game, each stage held many hidden items that could only be found after very careful searching. This lengthy exploration was particularly important if you wanted to collect the six precious Chaos Emeralds.

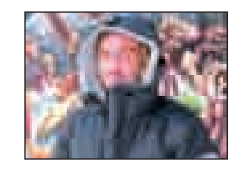
Although it has since been superseded by many (often superior) sequels, the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* still holds a very special place in our hearts.



▼ Pick up enough speed and you could run up walls and upside down. Super-Sonic.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1991





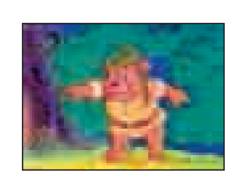
FASHION VICTIM:

If you needed any further proof that the latest 'street' look can make you appear like a right idiot (or in this case, the Michelin Man) then the puffa jacket was the perfect place to start. Strictly for Arctic explorers only.



AT THE MOVIES:

After finding huge success with *The Terminator*, it was inevitable that James Cameron, Linda Hamilton and Arnie would return for the sequel, which was filled with state-of-the-art effects and fantastic action scenes.



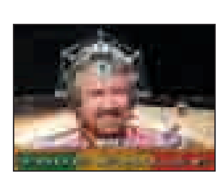
CARTOON HEROES:

Featuring characters with ridiculous names like Cubbi, Grammi, Gruffi and Zummi, Disney's *Adventures Of The Gummi Bears* proved essential viewing. And who could forget that theme song?



ON THE RADIO:

Canadian rocker Bryan Adams not only released the successful *Waking Up The Neighbours* album, but also managed to hog the charts for an eternity with the dreadful *Everything I Do (I Do It For You)*.



ON THE BOX:

At one stage, watching Noel Edmonds on a Saturday evening was a national institution. *Noel's House Party* may have been what the viewers wanted, but we'll never forgive the bearded one for creating Mr. Blobby

B•A•R•B•A•R•I•A•N

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

OFF WITH HIS HEAD

B*arbarian* really struck a chord with us when it was released in 1987. Not only was it a competent one-on-one fighter with excellent animation and a variety of increasingly difficult opponents, it also had one of the goriest ending moves we've ever seen at the time.

Picture the scene: two strapping barbarians enter the arena and prepare for battle. Using a variety of button presses and joystick combos, you're able to execute a dizzying array of special moves with your huge broadsword. Rolling into your opponent, you rise to your feet and kick him squarely in the face. While the poor fool is still stunned you deliver a devastating overhead chop and follow it up with a sharp swing to his midriff.

Release: 1987
Format: Various
Publisher: Palace Software
Developer: In-House

Knowing you have the offensive, you roll into your hapless foe and knock him to his feet a second time, then savagely headbutt him as he staggers onto his weakened legs. The end is near and you prepare for your deadliest move; turning full circle, you slice your opponent's head clean from his neck. A fountain of blood gushes from the lifeless body and it slumps to the floor.

His humiliation isn't complete, though. A goblin makes his way into the arena, unceremoniously kicks the severed head across the floor then drags off the bleeding body while you raise your sword in triumph. Ace.





GREAT GAME BOSSES



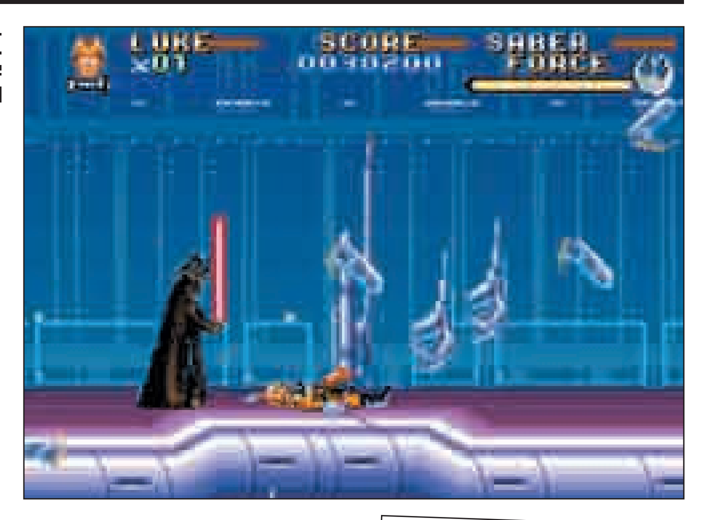
DARTH VADER IN SUPER EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Not content with being the toughest game of the series, *Super Empire Strikes Back* also sees you face off against the dreaded dark lord himself, Darth Vader. You've already battled him once on the previous level, but Vader used the Force to escape your clutches and is now awaiting your final battle.

As you make your way to the climactic showdown, the sound of slow, rhythmic breathing is the only indication that you're drawing near to your nemesis. "The Force is with you, young Skywalker," praises Vader, but the compliments abruptly end as the Dark Lord of the Sith draws his Lightsaber and prepares for battle.

As Vader blocks your laser shots with ease, you realise that only your own Lightsaber and the powers of the Force will be able to save you. A few quick thrusts, slashes and swings of your trusty saber and Vader's suddenly on the defensive. Heartened by the sudden change in fate, you press the attack and start to gain the upper hand. Slowly but ever so surely, Vader's energy starts to slip away and you quickly heal yourself in preparation for his defeat.

But then, without warning, Vader bows his head and uses his own connection to the Force to pull apart the room you're fighting in and bombard you with rubble. Caught off guard by the vicious attack, you fall to the floor with the Dark Lord's mocking words ringing in your ears – "All too easy". Next time, though, you'll be ready for him…



Release: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: LucasArts Entertainment
Developer: Sculptured Software

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE

Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll

Release: 1990
Format: NES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare

If Rare's output could be summed up with one game, *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* would would probably slither off with the award before anyone could stop it. Featuring impressive visuals that belied the host hardware, a surreal sense of humour and some extremely hard (yet rewarding) gameplay, *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* is vintage Rare. What a shame that hardly anyone ever mentions it…

Released on the NES in 1990, *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* was an isometric platformer that saw you control a hungry snake who had to make his way up a mountain in order to reach the moon. This boiled down to slithering around the detailed and very bizarre landscapes, eating as many Nibbley Pibbleys as possible.

Although they started off as small coloured balls, the Nibbley Pibbleys evolved as the game went on and took many odd forms. Hopping around on springs, sprouting legs and running away and even developing wings were just a few of the strange creatures' defences, and great skill was needed in order to catch them all (especially those damn quick yellow ones). Fortunately, your heroic snake was incredibly agile and would quickly head in whatever direction you sent him.

There were plenty of enemies to dodge throughout the surreal landscapes and the tight controls made the game a joy to play. Of course, the isometric viewpoint did present a few problems (especially when jumping on certain stages) but it was much better implemented than in other games in the genre, which is no surprise as Rare always was the master of isometric 3D.

Although your Snake started off as just a head, munching on Nibbley Pibbleys would see him get longer and fatter. Capture Pibbleys of the same colour as your snake – or better yet, grab the more powerful yellow Pibbleys – and your reptile would pile on the pounds even faster. When enough of the little critters had been eaten, you needed find each level's set of scales and leap on them. If you'd gained enough weight, you could move onto the next stage; fail and it was back to more Pibbley munching.

Like Rare's previous titles, this game was steeped in quirky humour and had a unique charm. Large, disembodied feet would appear and attempt to crush you into oblivion, toilet seats chased you through the isometric landscapes, and straying into the many stretches of water would see you chased back to shore by a hungry shark, complete with a homage to the *Jaws* theme tune.

Add a strict time limit, a highly competitive two-player mode, plenty of secret warps and some increasingly complex level design and Rare had ensured that *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* still stands apart from its peers. Along with the likes of *Cobra Triangle* and *R.C. Pro-Am*, this title proved just how versatile Rare was, and it was part of a creative streak that continued well into the life of both the SNES and N64.



Although best known for its Spectrum, SNES and N64 output, Rare made dozens of titles for the NES, and among well-known titles such as *Battletoads* and *R.C. Pro-Am* you'll find the likes of *Slalom*, *Silent Service* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street*. Though not up to the standards associated with Rare, many of them are still worth playing – but give *Jeopardy!* and *Sesame Street 123* a wide berth…





UNSUNG

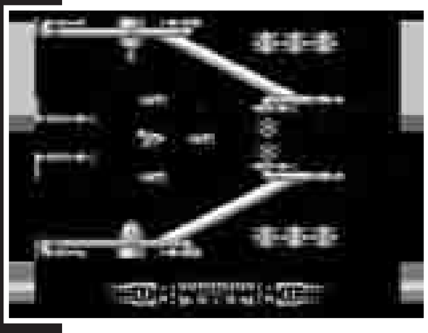
Retro gaming is becoming more mainstream these days, but there are a select few gamers who've been plugging away with fanzines and websites for years without so much as a 'thank you'. In our quest to meet all the people who make retro fandom possible, we caught up with Frank Gasking…



Ever wondered what happened to the Commodore 64 versions of *Gauntlet III* or *Tyger Tyger*? Then you may want to talk to Frank Gasking. Over the past six years, Gasking's passion for finding missing C64 titles has resulted in one of the most informative websites we've ever stumbled across. Games That Weren't (http://homepage.ntlworld.com/frank.gasking/) is a site that's dedicated to Commodore's 8-bit wonder and all the titles that were at some stage promised, but never actually released for it.

Based in Dover, and still at the tender age of 22, Gasking has become a bit of a legend on the Commodore 64 scene and is responsible (with the help of numerous contributors) for rediscovering many games that have slipped into obscurity. Wanting to discover more about Gasking's great site, we tracked him down to discuss the origins of Games That Weren't and how he discovers all these missing gems.

▼ Most people thought shoot-'em-up *Armalyte 2* would never see the light of day.



THE INTERVIEW

games™: Where did you get the idea for GTW?

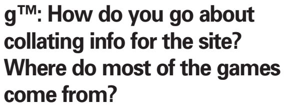
FG: It originated from an article by Ian Osbourne in *Commodore Force* magazine. The feature covered a series of games that never saw the light of day, such as *Great Giana Sisters* and *Gauntlet III*. I was keen to find out where these games had ended up, and wanted to play them out of curiosity. In the late Nineties, I started writing a regular GTW feature for a fanzine run by Jason Mackenzie, but was soon convinced to make it a dedicated site. Interest grew, and more games started to surface. After many transitions, GTW was fully born in the form it is today.

g™: How long has GTW been up and running?

FG: The site has been running since 1999. It originally began as a site with my own C64 productions, and GTW was a sub-part. In 2003, I scrapped the old site and re-launched fully as the more popular GTW64. Sadly a great contributor and friend, Martin Holland, passed away just days before its launch, so the site was dedicated in his name.

g™: Why run a site like this just for the C64? Do you intend to cover any other machines?

FG: I've always been a massive C64 fan since I was young, and considering my inspirations for the project came from the C64, it was natural to start with that platform. I've no time to cover other systems, so I have approached other people about starting up GTW sites for their respective scenes. At the moment there is an Amiga GTW in production, and possibly one for the Amstrad. The Spectrum currently has Games That Time Forgot at Steve Brown's excellent TZX Vault (http://tzxvault.retrogames.com). I hope GTW64 is an indication of what's possible for other systems.



g™: How do you go about collating info for the site? Where do most of the games come from?

FG: Old C64 and multiformat magazines are a fantastic source for scans and information and the internet has also proved to be an extremely useful source. The games themselves have been collected from various compilations, people's disk collections or loaned by the actual developers.

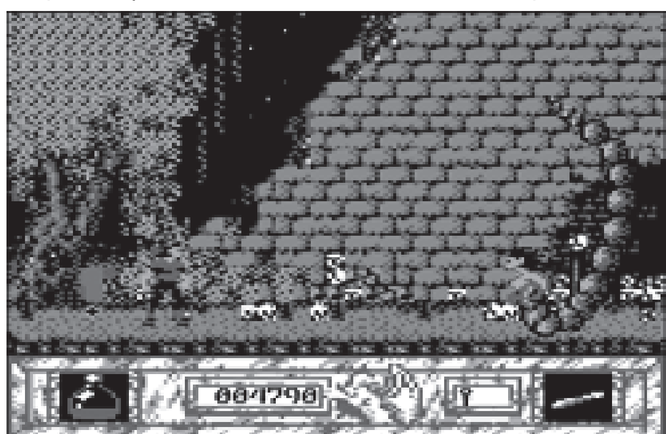
g™: Any interesting stories you can tell us about getting hold of particular games?

FG: The most remarkable has to be about *Solar Jetman*. The conversion only got the briefest of mentions in *Zzap 64*, so we assumed the game had never been started. Around 2000, though, we exchanged emails with [designer] Haydn Dalton who gave a list of all his unreleased work, which included *Solar Jetman*. I was shocked to learn that the game was completed but the publisher had decided to scrap the home computer licences at the last minute. Haydn couldn't find the game, so it was down to finding the programmer, John Buckley. Although we eventually tracked him down in 2003, he didn't have the game either and so all seemed lost.

Suddenly, two weeks after speaking with the game's author,

▲ Wise beyond his years, young Gasking here knows *everything* about missing C64 games.

▼ Only one level of *Spellcast* for the C64 was finished, but it's still Frank's favourite discovery.



HEROES

there was an email from Haydn. He'd decided to clean up his spare room and had discovered a briefcase stuffed behind a radiator. Upon opening it he found a load of bits from various computer shows and three C64 floppy disks with 'Solar Jetman' written on them. Extremely excited, Haydn sent them to me via registered post. I was shaking upon receiving the disks, not knowing if they would still work. Fortunately, after a few whirrs on the disk drive, the game suddenly came to life. As quick as a flash I backed the game up on several disks, and then ported it over to PC before it disintegrated or something. It's probably the biggest find we have ever had so far.

g™: Are there any particular games that people constantly ask about?

FG: There's actually two that have been causing loss of sleep since the site first started. The games are *Daffy Duck* by Hi-Tec Software (1992) and *Murder* by US Gold (1990) on the C64. Both games are two of the most wanted C64 titles of all time and were reviewed with high marks. There's been so much pressure to find these titles, and we're even close to actually finding *Daffy Duck*. Hi-Tec's ex-director, David Palmer, confirmed he has all the master disks, but sadly his mails are now bouncing.

g™: What do people in the industry think of your site?

FG: It's generally mixed. The positive responses are mostly from those who contact us after coming across the site and they notice we're hosting one of their games, so they then help us build up a background for their work. Sadly, there are instances where people were treated so badly by the games industry that they don't look back. One thing we always try and do is to get credit for developer's hard work.

g™: Are you ever approached by companies wishing to track down particular titles?

FG: Not so much companies, but developers from various companies have approached us. There have often been incidents where ex-C64 developers have got rid of their disks and are desperate to find copies of their old work. One particular guy got pretty emotional when we found the remains of a game he'd lost 15 years ago. He, like many others, had got rid of all his disks all those years ago, and just wanted to archive pretty much his life's work.

g™: What do you think about the current interest in retro gaming?

FG: I think it's fantastic! The way the retro concept has taken off is nothing short of phenomenal. You can walk down the high street and pick up 8- and 16-bit classics again, and having a SNES sitting next to the PS2 is quite cool nowadays. Retro originally seemed to be something for a handful of people who wanted to hold on to their lost childhood; now it's becoming a kind of trend for gamers today.

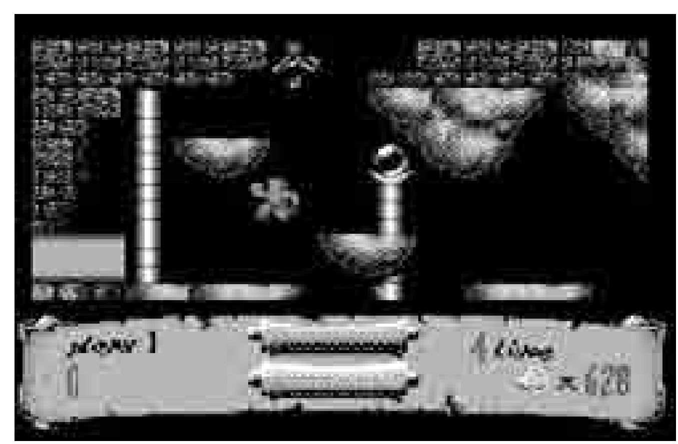
g™: How much of your time is dedicated to the site?

FG: I do a bit of site work every day. This varies from doing research, to actually putting the site together. There are days where I get five minutes to days where I end up with a whole day to work on it.

g™: How did you get in touch with the other contributors to the site?

FG: In the beginning, David [Simmonds] emailed me with submissions of information, and even a few games. There was so much help being given by David it seemed only right to ask him if he wanted to be part of the project.

▼ *Tyger Tyger*, burning bright, in the forests of the… no, wait, on the C64. Our mistake.





▲ *Gauntlet III* – see, it *does* exist on the C64.

Retro Feature

David now helps track down titles and arranges for them to be fixed up for the site, *Tyger Tyger* being the main example.

Andrew [Fisher] was a writer for *Zzap*'s successor, *Commodore Force*, and later on a few fanzines. Since that time we'd been in touch via email, and it was in 2003 at BIT Brighton when I met Andrew in person. I was so impressed with his commitment and work that I asked him about joining up, to which he happily agreed.

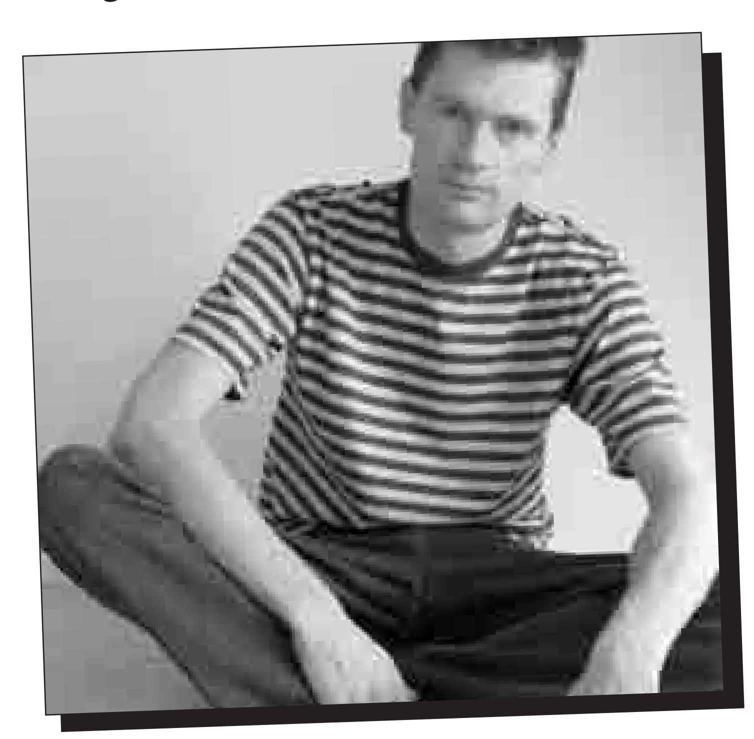
g™: Which GTW title is your favourite?

FG: Probably *Spellcast* by Genesis Software. It's a great *Ghosts 'N Goblins*/*Castlevania* clone but, sadly, only one level was ever finished. Second place has to go to System 3's *Deadlock*, which is just awesome to look at – so thanks to Dan Phillips for letting that one out.

DAN CLAPSON

It might not be a name you're familiar with, but Dan Clapson has been a part of the videogame industry for over 20 years. Eager to learn more about this multi-tasking figure, we tracked him down to find out how to get ahead in television

interviewed by DARRAN JONES



Dan Clapson's CV makes for impressive reading. From creating games for various 8- and 16-bit computers, he went on to research, produce and direct computer-related TV shows such as *Bad Influence*, *The Net* and *Games World*. He's now returned to his roots and is once again creating games and software tools for mobile phones. Circle of life, and all that…

Clapson's first videogame experience wasn't in the darkened confines of his bedroom, as is the case with many retro gamers, but down the local youth club. Walking in there one day, when he was about 10 years old, he found the place deserted. "I went downstairs into the basement to see if anyone was there and found everyone standing and shouting around a TV set," recalls Clapson. "Some kid was playing a game on a ZX81 and it had the attention of each and every one of us. I was as interested as the rest of them and thought to myself, 'wouldn't it be cool if I could make a game myself'. So I did."

Immediately won over by the new technology, Clapson set about the difficult task of persuading his parents to buy him his own machine. "They thought it was just a fad, soon to be forgotten…" he laughs. However, his persistence paid off and his father was soon marching him towards the nearest Dixons to pick up his first computer, a humble TI-99/4a. "The TI-99/4a was an extremely unpopular computer in the UK, and I was ridiculed at school for owning it, as everyone else owned Spectrum and C64s," Clapson explains. "Looking back, though, I think it was a blessing in disguise; there were so few games available for it I had to create my own. At first I taught myself TI-Basic, which was slow and extremely limited. I then sent in my creations to games magazines, and they printed the code listing so that readers could type it in and play it." Buoyed by his initial success, but frustrated with Basic, Clapson realised he needed to learn another language in order to achieve his goals and decided to turn to Assembler.

"Basic was, and still is, rubbish, but while Assembler is relatively difficult to learn, once you know it you'll never want to touch Basic again," Clapson explains. "The two most popular assembly languages at the time were Z80 and 6502 and the TI-99 used neither. So with the money I earned from the magazine game listings I bought myself an Atari 800xl which used 6502 and then swotted up on 6502 from a book I bought in Boots." Before long, Clapson had his first commercial game, *Winston In The Caves*, published and he went on to design and program several other popular titles like *Cool Spot*, *Chip's Challenge* and *Dragonscape* for various systems.

AS GOOD AS A REST

Clearly liking a bit of variety in his life, Clapson lived in China for a while, teaching arcade and console programming. But, eager to share his enthusiasm for computers with the masses, Clapson's next move was into TV and in the early Nineties he became a TV researcher on children's shows such as *Short Change* and *Bad Influence*. As his experience grew, Clapson found himself directing and producing shows such as *GamesWorld*, *Massive* and *Gamers* and quickly realised what was needed to make a a successful games show.

"Most people that pitch videogame shows miss one important factor; they don't understand what TV commissioners want," explains Clapson. "Having a great idea is a long way down a commissioner's priority list. The pitcher needs to understand the politics of how and why a show is made; that most commercial channels want to make money, and your idea has to make money for them, and that the show will be watched by females and blokes."

He isn't too enamoured with current gaming shows and thinks there's plenty of room for improvement. "Get the show on at the right time of day, for starters, and don't accept a commission from a third-rate channel like Bravo," continues Clapson "Stop showing people playing games as it makes for totally rubbish telly. I hate watching it, and I think so does the target audience. Just keep it simple. News, reviews and previews should be the main hub of the show. That's what the viewers want."

After spending 10 years in the TV industry, Clapson is now back doing what he loves – making games. Although he's concentrating on the mobile phone market, Clapson says it's little different from what he was doing 20 years ago. "Mobile phones and old games machines have severe memory and speed limitations," he explains. "In my opinion this is good for gamers as it forces developers to focus heavily on good game design and ideas. We cannot hide bad gameplay behind cinematic special effects which might look good yet play

▲ *Numbers Ladder* is a Java game that mixes the popular concepts of space-age architecture and, um, numbers.

poorly. For years now I felt that the magic has been lost with games. They can take years to develop and the end result looks like a cheap movie. With mobile games I can relive my childhood bedroom coding antics. They allow me to create brilliant little games in a couple of months and people want to pay me to play them. What more could I ask for?"

While the mobile phone gaming market is relatively new, Clapson thinks it's going places. "I see mobile phone devices soon becoming as good as handheld consoles like the Sony PSP," he confidently states. "My understanding is that Sony is going to use the same technology seen in the PSP in its mobile phones. It will simply repackage the technology so that it's first and foremost a device to talk into, and secondly be able to play stunning games. There is a market for PSP-quality games appearing on both a dedicated device and built into phones. Next year we'll see phones that are capable of playing games as good as PlayStation. At that point I think mobile gaming will become mass-market."

Despite his forward-thinking, Clapson is glad of all the interest that retro gaming is receiving. "Our gaming heritage deserves respect, as pretty much every game today is based on an idea created back in the Seventies or Eighties," he explains. "I hope, one day, that the people behind great games become known for their work. We need names like David Braben, the Oliver Twins, the Bitmap Brothers and the Darlings again as they put a human face to games. It works for movies, music, magazines and telly, so why won't it work for games?" Why not indeed…

▼ *Back To The Future II* let you visit the future without a DeLorean – you just needed an Amiga…

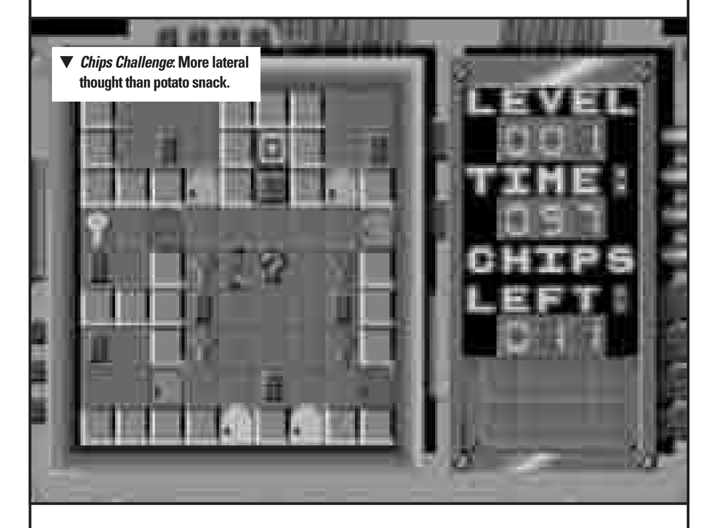


SOFTOGRAPHY

From games created for machines with limited memory space to, er, games created for machines with limited memory space, Dan Clapson's development history has come full circle…

Design:

Winston In The Caves, Atari User
(Atari 400/600/800/xl/xe) 1984
Commando, Elite
(Atari 400/600/800/xl/xe) ....Unpublished
Cool Spot, Virgin/7-Up
(Atari St/Commodore/Amiga) 1989
Back To The Future II, Mirrorsoft
(Atari ST/Commodore Amiga) 1990
Chips Challenge, Epyx/US Gold
(Atari ST/Amiga) 1990



▼ *Chips Challenge*: More lateral thought than potato snack.

Revune, Dreamworld Games (Java Applet) 2001
Aquatack, Dreamworld Games (Java Applet) 2001
Numbers Ladder (Java Applet)....................2002
Quad, 4T2 (Mobile)....................2003
Star Warriors, Elite Systems (Mobile)....................2003
Quad, 4T2 (online port of mobile version) 2004



Retro Contact

Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact
If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

IN MY DAY...

Dear games™
I'm writing to you with a complaint, or what you might call a rant. Not about the magazine, but about a small group of individuals who, for argument's sake, I'll call 'hardcore retro-gamers'. This group tend to hang around forums, evangelising the magnificence of old games. They completely disregard modern gaming as nothing more than child's play, saying they're more about the graphics than the gameplay. Games were always better back in the Seventies and Eighties (so this group likes to believe) and nothing can come close to beating them.

It's opinions like these that put retro gaming and retro gamers in a bad light. Whilst we can all enjoy older titles, only a person with their head buried in the sand can ignore the wide range of superb games currently available across the PS2, Xbox and GameCube.

Gaming didn't end with the Spectrum, Amiga or SNES; it's still going strong and getting better each year. It's about time certain gamers stopped living in the past and maybe once in a while had a look to the future.
Pete Wilstone

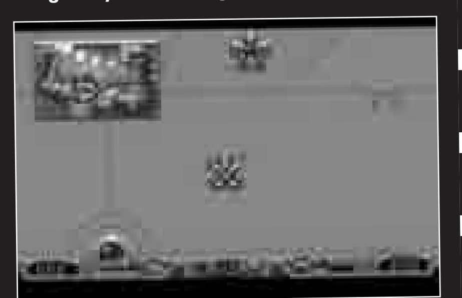
You're quite right, Pete, it would be churlish to suggest that all the best games were made in the past, but some gamers won't have it any other way. While we use the Retro section to celebrate classic games, we'd be liars if we said that every game that ever appeared on the Spectrum or Atari ST was amazing. Our advice is to just ignore retro-fiends or replace their beloved C64 with a PS2 and a copy of *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*.

O, BROTHERS, WHERE ART THOU?

Dear games™
I'm a relatively new reader to your mag, so I hope you haven't covered this already. I was wondering if you would be running a Bitmap Brothers feature any time soon. They made some of the most memorable games for me on my Amiga 500 – namely *Gods*, *Speedball 2*, *Magic Pockets* and *The Chaos Engine* – and I'd love to learn more about them.

Also, can you remember what the name of Team 17's sideways-scrolling shooter with the amazing graphics was?
Martin

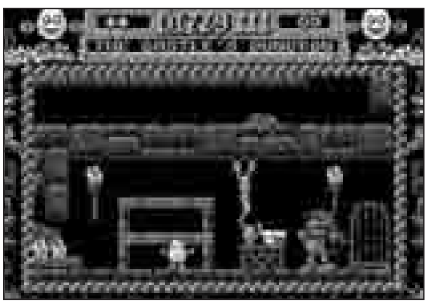
Sorry, Martin, but we've already covered the Bitmap Brothers back in issue 4, so it's unlikely that we'll be returning to them soon. We can help you with your Team 17 question, though – the game you're looking for is *Project X*.



A new Olympic sport? It'll knock the dressage into next week…

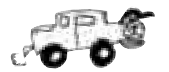
LIKE A WHIRLPOOL

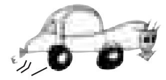
Dear games™
I'm an avid fan of your magazine and would like to point out a few things that may help you regarding *Dizzy*. Melissa Jakes wrote into the Retro Contact section and asked if *Dizzy* has plans for a comeback. Having spoken to Andrew Oliver I can confirm that the movie featured on the Fantastic Dizzy website was only to see what he would look like and not any teaser for a game. There are a few games out that have been released that are more or less what *Dizzy* would be like in 3D with Mr. Oliver giving *Chicken Run* as a good eggsample.
Andrew Joseph



Don't worry, the Egg is still resolutely two-dimensional.

Thanks for the info, Andrew. We've been in touch with the Oliver Twins and you've already probably seen their answers about *Dizzy* on page 133. In the meantime, if any of our readers want more *Dizzy* details, visit Andrew's website at www.yolkfolk.com.





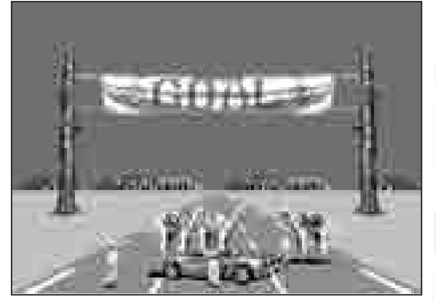
OUTRUN MASTERY

Dear games™
Nice feature on *Power Drift* in issue 23's 'Clash of the Titans'. I'm just going to dig out the Amiga version for a blast and see if it's as good as I remember. Maybe you can do an Amiga Vs ST version some time?

Anyway, what would be the chance of an *OutRun* Clash of the Titans, as it's one of my favourite games? I always remember a friend coming round to have a look at my Master System version and he was moaning because there was no Ferrari badge on the back of the car; he was kicking off about the ST version wiping the floor with it. Then a few years later I had the chance to play the Amiga version. It was complete crap. Funnily enough, I still play the Master System version at work via emulator.
I G Maloney

Although we'd love to do a 'Clash of the Titans' on *OutRun*, we've only just recently covered the game in a two-page spread. It's quite possible that it's something we'll look into in





OutRun? You should have been here a few issues ago, mate.

the future, but for the time being it's not something we'll be looking at.

WISE GUY, HUH?

Dear games™
I was reading through your Retro section, enjoying it as usual, when my beady little eye spotted something amiss in your 'It Started With A Fist' article. In fact, I was impressed how you were able to get a copy of *Guardian Heroes* for the Sega Saturn in 1989 when our much beloved Sega console wasn't released in the UK until 1995. Okay, okay, I know it could have been one of those magical 'pre-release' copies. I am, however, willing to overlook this tomfoolery if you can get me a 'pre-release' copy of *Winning Eleven 14* for the PlayStation3.
Nick



P.S. I've been told that sarcasm is the lowest form of wit…

Congratulations, you've spotted our intentional mistake and have won a fantastic prize. Send us your address and we'll pop a PS3 and a copy of *Winning Eleven 14* as soon as our time-travelling DeLorean has been fixed.

DREAMCAST PERFECTION

Dear games™
After reading this month's 'The Ultimate Collection', I felt inspired to write and tell you about my own collection of retro games.

I, like so many loyal Sega fans, upgraded from my Master System to Mega Drive, then a Saturn and finally onto the Dreamcast. After Sega announced the demise of this excellent piece of hardware, I found myself buying up cheap software from stores desperate to clear their shelves of redundant stock. I soon had over a hundred titles, so decided that I might as well complete the entire collection.

After quite a difficult search, I finally completed the entire PAL collection and now have all 215 games that Sega Europe released in the UK. To complement all the PAL titles, I also bought some of the more sought-after imports – titles like *Sports Jam*, *Alien Front* and *Ooga Booga* that never saw the light of day in the UK, along with Japanese novelties.

It has been a rewarding task and to finally complete it has been my crowning achievement in the world of videogaming.
Anthony

That's quite an impressive collection, Anthony, and must have cost a fair amount of cash. How many of those games do you actually play, though? We recall quite a lot of rubbish being released on the PAL Dreamcast, so unless you're a masochist we expect that a lot of those games have hardly been touched. Still, it's a fine example of completism. Good work.

STAR LETTER

OLD-SCHOOL RULES

Dear games™
How could you forget the first beat-'em-up for home consoles, *Chuck Norris Superkicks* on the Atari 2600 in 1982? It was a scrolling kung fu game with multiple moves (you could even do somersaults) and tricky paths to follow, as well as an end of level boss.

It was a double-ender cart (the other side was *Artillery Duel*) and was released by Xonox and later re-released under the name of *Kung Fu Superkicks* by Telegames as a single cart.
Thomas Holzer, France

God knows how we missed that gem… Although to try and save face, we're going to reveal that it was only renamed *Kung Fu Superkicks* because the Chuck Norris licence ran out. Hopefully, a T-shirt from Joystick Junkies should be just enough reward for getting one over on the retro editor.



That there is Chuck Norris (obviously), although his super kicks aren't shown. Trust us, though, they are super.



C•L•A•S•S•I•C C•O•N•S•O•L•E ££

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£20-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£100-200
Super Grafx	£200-300

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Sega Saturn	£20-35
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system) (prices for multi-slots are higher)	£70
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

MACHINE OF THE MONTH



- **NAME:** Virtual Boy
- **PRICE:** £75-£100 with a game
- **THREE OF THE BEST:**
  Mario Tennis (est price £15)
  Galactic Pinball (est price £20)
  Mario Clash (est price £25)
- The Virtual Boy is a prime collector's item, so long as you don't mind the lack of games to go with it.

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Simply send the following to: gtm@paragon.co.uk ■ Your name ■ Your age (you must be over 18) ■ Your home address and telephone number (this will not be given out) ■ Your email address ■ The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month) ■ The condition of the item(s) ■ How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will be listed along with your region.

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WANTED

Contact us in the same way as above stating what items you want and any preferences on condition or price.

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This service is for private sellers, not dealers. Retro items only (nothing post-Dreamcast). No Mega Drive *FIFA* games – everyone has at least two. Highbury Entertainment cannot accept responsibility for items lost or broken in the post.

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Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.

FOR SALE – LOT 114

NTSC N64 WITH 10 GAMES

Including *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo Tooie*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, *Mario Kart 64* and *Pilot Wings*. Everything is boxed and in superb condition. Only £160. Barnstaple.



FOR SALE

LOT 90 – Neo-Geo AES with two joysticks, a memory card and 11 games including *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos*, *Metal Slug 3* and *4*, *Fatal Fury Special* and *Alpha Mission* (games are English and Japanese, email for details). £1,000 ONO (will consider splitting). Shane at shamus1roks@yahoo.co.uk

LOT 93 – Games: *Daytona USA* (Saturn, PAL), excellent condition, £2. *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (Amiga, PAL), good condition, £1.50. *Zero Wing* (Mega Drive, PAL), good condition, £7. *Golden Axe 3* (Mega Drive, NTSC), excellent condition, £27. *Soukyugurentai* (Saturn, black cover, NTSC), excellent condition, £28. garethcrowley@hotmail.com

LOT 98 – PAL SNES with eight games including *Mario World*, *Uni Rally*, *Super Castlevania* and *Flashback*. All unboxed but in very good condition. £90. Aberdeen.

LOT 99 – *Harvest Moon 64* for N64. American version and in mint condition. £55. New Milton.

LOT 102 – *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*, Master System. Great condition, has instructions. £12.

LOT 105 – *Mario Allstars* for PAL SNES. Boxed, great condition. £25.

LOT 107 – *Sega Rally* for the Saturn. This is easily one of the greatest racing games ever made and looks fantastic on the Saturn. This is the American NTSC version, but it is in superb condition. Yours for only £10. Crawley.

LOT 109 – NES with seven games including *Super Mario Bros 3*, *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Solstice* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. All games unboxed but in decent condition. £50. Dublin.

LOT 111 – Commodore 64C Family and Hollywood Pack. Comes with one joystick plus ten games, including *Rambo*, *Top Gun*, *Trivial Pursuits and The Krypton Factor* (full list via email). All fully boxed, hardly used and in very good condition. £80 ONO. Contact S Hockley on hockleyhc@btinternet.com

LOT 112 – Two Amiga games on one disk, *Breaker* and *Alutia's Jewels*, only £5 (incl. P&P). Contact Andrew Burton on aliensrcooluk@yahoo.co.uk or 07765 791896 for further information.

LOT 113 – Great Sega bundle. Contains PAL Mega CD (boxed, no AC adaptor), two Mega Drives with 15 games and four controllers, one Saturn (boxed) with eight games, Master System with six games and gun. Not all games are boxed, but all items are in perfect condition. £200 (I will sell separately). Kieran Lyons: monkiki@eircom.net, or contact (35391) 751464

WANTED

WANTED 35 – *King Of Fighters 2001* or *2002* for Neo Geo AES, boxed with manual. Good price paid. Derbyshire.

WANTED 36 – C64 and any games published by either Hewson or 21st Century Entertainment. Manchester.

WANTED 41 – Sega 32X. Must be in good working order. Will pay up to £40. Cambridgeshire.

WANTED 46 – *Metal Slug* for Neo-Geo AES. Will pay reasonable price if in good condition. Essex.

WANTED 49 - *Sonic 1, 2* and *3*, and *Sonic & Knuckles*. Would prefer boxes and manuals. Will pay £5 each. iantennie@hotmail.com

WANTED 52 – *Jumping Flash 2* for PSone. Will pay up to £30 for copy in good condition. West Midlands.

WANTED 54 – Boxed copy of *Elemental Master* for Mega Drive, either Japanese or American. sambolland@yahoo.com

WANTED 56 – Manuals for *Dragon Warrior Monsters* (GB), *Warhammer*, *Warhammer Dark Omen* (PS) and *Ecco The Dolphin* (MD). Linda@activemail.co.uk

WANTED 58 – *Shining Force 3* (PAL Saturn). Can swap for *Nights: Into Dreams* + *Nights: Christmas Edition*. Call Thomas Davies, 01244 329996.

WANTED 59 – *R-Type Delta* for PSone. Will pay reasonable price if good condition. Tim, 07961 840764.

WANTED 60 – *Radiant Silvergun* for Sega Saturn. Will pay up to £80. Sunderland.

WANTED 61 – Nintendo Game & Watch titles. Will pay reasonable prices. Must be mint, boxed. Bath.

GAMES™ RETRO CLASSIFIEDS

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THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR IS MARTIN BREAR, A 32-YEAR-OLD RETAIL MANAGER FROM RAMSGATE. HE'S BEEN COLLECTING SOFTWARE FOR OVER A DECADE AND HAS MORE GAMES THAN YOU HAVE MOLECULES. OR SOMETHING.

Q) How long have you been collecting?
I'd say about 10 years now.

Q) How much is your collection worth?
I wouldn't like to say, but I can imagine it's now running into the thousands.

Q) How did your interest in collecting come about?
Me and a friend (we've both been into gaming since the Spectrum/C64 days) started looking around second-hand shops in London to see who could find the best import game at the lowest price. He won by finding some Super Famicom *Final Fantasy* games for £5, so I felt compelled to beat him.

Q) What's your most prized possession?
Probably my PC Engine collection, especially my boxed GT, which cost me £80. I bought it off eBay 'blind' – there was no picture so it was a bit of a gamble. When it turned up mint in the box with all its bags and instructions with three boxed games, I was more than pleasantly surprised.

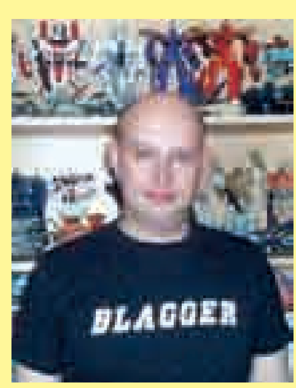
Q) What's the most highly desirable item that you haven't found yet?
I'm actually after *Musha Aleste* on the Japanese Mega Drive. Every time I've seen one, it's managed to slip though my fingers…

Q) What sources do you use and have you ever found a real bargain?
Usually eBay, second-hand shops and car-boot sales. I've also got a few friends that I work with who look out for stuff for me, one of whom brought me a copy of *Earthbound* for the Super Nintendo back from a visit to the States. My best buy was a pile of original Nintendo Game & Watches for 50p each – I bought nine of them and their sale nearly completely funded my Neo Geo AES. I also got a pretty decent pile of Jamma PCBs and a Neo Geo MVS 4 slot motherboard and five carts from a local arcade for just £100.

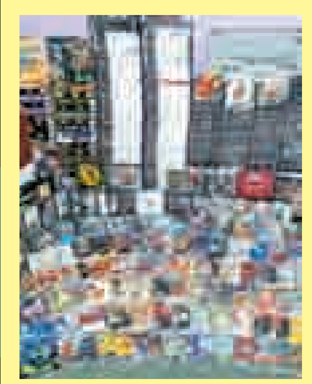
Q) What does your family think of your collecting?
My fiancée is great about it; she even goes out looking for stuff for me sometimes. A few weeks back she came back from a car-boot with the handlebars from a *Hang-On* arcade machine. That's the most unusual thing that she's found.

Q) What's the most money you've ever spent on a single item?
Apart from new or imported consoles when they were released, I guess Neo Geo and arcade stuff. Oh, and a Supergun. I don't usually pay much over the odds for anything; in my view if you wait long enough, you'll eventually grab a real bargain.


C'mon, there's got to be some duds in there.



He's a blagger, a collector, a lover, a fighter…


Ever wondered what 'wall-to-wall' meant?

NEXT MONTH IN RETRO



In next month's Retro section we'll be looking at Sonic Mega Collection Plus, rediscovering our favourite horizontal shooters and digging up more classic games… *See you then!*

ON SALE 02 DEC


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



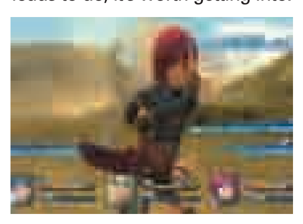
VIEWTIFUL JOE

We doubt that GameCube owners will be pleased to see one of their few Capcom exclusives being released on a rival console, but that doesn't make the game any less brilliant. As side-scrolling beat-'em-ups go, they really don't get much better than this.



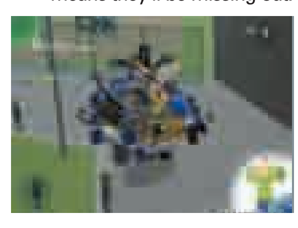
STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

Whether you're a newcomer to the *Star Ocean* universe or not, the latest game in the series offers more than enough to keep any RPG fan happy. Beautifully animated, well scripted and with loads to do, it's worth getting into.



KATAMARI DAMACY

So, the US version is now out and at a bargain price too… does it make the game any better? Of course it does – particularly as all the Japanese quirkiness has been left in for the US audience. We doubt they'll get it, but that just means they'll be missing out.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

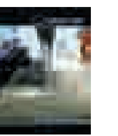
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue, now that the remodelled one-quarter-size PStwo is available.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

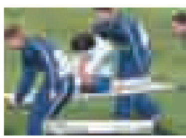
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The two games that pretty much put the PS2 where it is
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports Big	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Silent Hill 2	Konami	In-House	The high point of Konami's survival horror series
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
Star Ocean: Till The End Of Time	Ubisoft	Square-Enix	Square proves that there's life beyond *Final Fantasy*
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

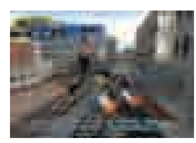
Burnout 3: Takedown
■ **A defining moment in arcade racing history that does Criterion proud – a must-have for any gamer.**



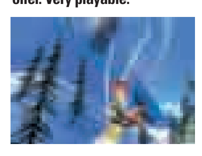
Pro Evolution Soccer 4
■ **The best football game on any console. Yes, any console. Don't go trying to convince us otherwise…**



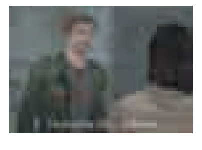
Tony Hawk's Underground 2
■ **All the decent elements from the last game but none of the disappointments – another success for Neversoft.**



SSX 3
■ **Another great EA Sports Big title that provides the very best that the *SSX* series has to offer. Very playable.**



Silent Hill 2
■ **Even though the latest instalment managed to recapture some of the magic, this one's still the best.**









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

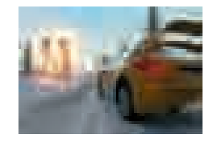
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xboxes
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	In-House	The classic series continues in well-presented style
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	As comprehensive an online racer as you're ever likely to find
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
Star Wars: Battlefront	Activision	Pandemic Studios	A great game first, a great Star Wars game second
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Ion Storm	*Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages? Sounds good to us…

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Halo
Almost time to put the original aside – once *Halo 2* comes out in a few weeks, you'll never play it again.



Rallisport Challenge 2
If *Burnout 3* takes the arcade racer crown, then *RalliSport Challenge 2* claims the rally title.



Ninja Gaiden
Haven't managed to beat the super-human difficulty of Tecmo's ninja adventure yet? Honestly, there's always one.



Def Jam: FFNY
Plays just as well as the other versions but looks best on the Xbox – those lighting effects are lovely.



Star Wars: KOTOR
One of only a handful of truly decent *Star Wars* games around today. If you like RPGs, you really need it.

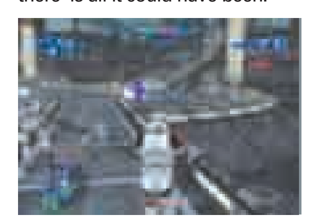






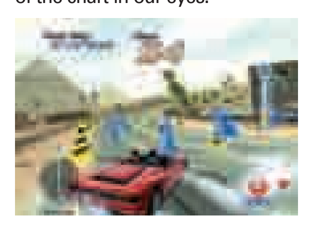
STARWARS BATTLEFRONT

And there we were, slightly worried that *Battlefront* wouldn't be as good as we'd hoped. Oh, how wrong we were. True, some people are picking holes. but for us the feeling of actually 'being there' is all it could have been.



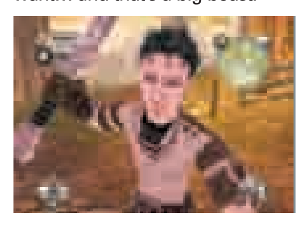
OUTRUN 2

Bravo, Sumo Digital, bravo. As different to *Burnout 3* as coloured chalk is to a fine cheddar, we can't say enough good things about *OutRun 2*. We just hope that everyone else sees it our way; it deserves to go straight to the top of the chart in our eyes.



FABLE

Forget the hype that everyone's built up about Big Blue Box's epic tale of good and evil – all you need to know is that it's an utterly great adventure. Why? One word: freedom. The freedom to do pretty much whatever you want… and that's a big boast.



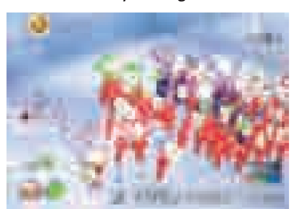
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



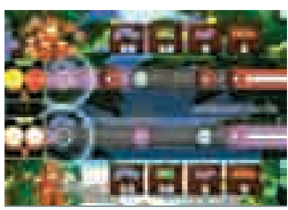
PIKMIN 2

Miyamoto-san's green-fingered army goes on the march again, this time with enough longevity to keep even the most avid gardening gamer happy. Just when you think you're nearly done, something else pops up to baffle you. Ingenious stuff.



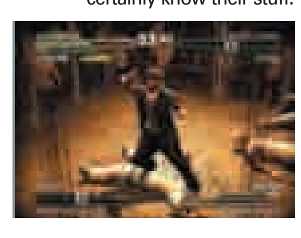
DONKEY KONGA

We've been enjoying the bongo-bashing action of Nintendo's rhythm action extravaganza for a long time now, but the PAL release means that now everyone can play. We're just disappointed that Nintendo didn't release the improved sequel first instead.



DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NEW YORK

Vendetta might have been a great example of wrestling that isn't wrestling, but this latest *Def Jam* game takes the brutality to a whole new level. You have to hand it to the folks at Aki – they certainly know their stuff.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

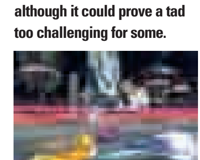
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

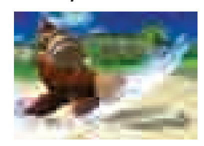
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Winning Eleven 6 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The only essential football game for the GameCube
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

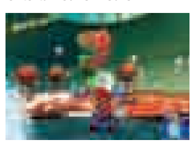
Tales Of Symphonia
An absolutely sprawling adventure that'll keep you glued to your GameCube for a very, very long time indeed.



F-Zero GX
Still one of the fastest racing games around, although it could prove a tad too challenging for some.



Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour
Videogame golf as it's meant to be – fun and fantastical, rather than tired and overly realistic.



Super Mario Sunshine
Not the greatest Mario game ever, but still more than good enough to keep you entertained for hours.

Super Monkey Ball 2
With Sega's monkey puzzler now coming to the PS2 and Xbox, this is the time to get some practice in.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 200
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £89.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

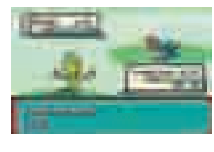
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor IMPORT	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square-Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

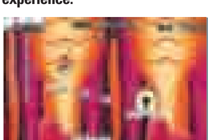
Astro Boy: Omega Factor
A return to handheld form for Sega, offering an intense mixture of quality platform and blasting action.



Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire
Nintendo might be milking Pokémon for all it's worth, but *Ruby* and *Sapphire* still stand out as the pinnacles of the series.



Mario Vs Donkey Kong
Nintendo's action puzzler is due out in the UK in a few weeks time. An enjoyable, if slightly short experience.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



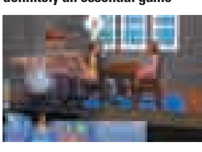
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
TRON 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

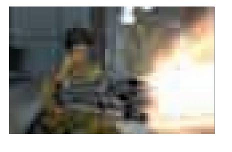
The Sims 2
Maxis achieves the impossible and improves on an already great formula – definitely an essential game



Far Cry
As FPS games go, this one's got everything you could ever need… so long as you're only interested in single-player.



Unreal Tournament 2004
Conversely, the latest in the *Unreal* series is one of the top multiplayer efforts around, but a little light on anything else.



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

MAGIC BOX

Console: Xbox
From: Farmer
Price: Approx £15
Available: Now (Import)

Okay, so perhaps the name 'Magic Box' is slightly misleading – this nifty little attachment isn't much use if you're looking to produce rabbits out of thin air or saw your Xbox in half without destroying it. What it does do, though, is provide Xbox owners with the opportunity to plug in their favourite joypad (or, as the box puts it, 'use your familiar and loving controller') instead of a regular Xbox one. It takes Saturn, Dreamcast and all PS2 pads and joysticks – including the rather meaty Hori one also shown on this page – which means that the excuse of not being used to the controller when you're being thrashed at *Pro Evolution Soccer*, *Street Fighter II*, *Tony Hawk* or any other game that's best played on a PS2 pad no longer applies. As invaluable a peripheral as they come, we'd recommend buying four… and some spares besides.

REAL ARCADE PRO STICK

Console: PlayStation2
From: Hori
Price: £50
Available: Now (Import)

AUTHENTIC ARCADE STYLE

If you're a real hardcore gamer with a fetish for the ultra-authentic, you're going to want a good old-fashioned joystick to replace those flimsy pads. Hori is known for its quality peripherals, so it should go without saying that a stick going by the name of the Real Arcade Pro is going to be something a little bit special. Built with a solid metal face, a rugged base that feels (and looks) reassuringly chunky and an exquisitely clicky joystick and set of buttons (not to mention various turbo and slow-mo settings for those who need them), the Real Arcade Pro lives up to its name and its price. Fifty pounds might sound like a lot, but the rewards are definitely worth it. Unfortunately, these joysticks are only available on import so be prepared to hunt around for a decent price that'll offset the shipping costs.

GIGAWORKS S750 7.1 SPEAKERS

Console: N/A
From: Creative
Price: £249.99
Available: Now



GREAT FOR ANY CONSOLE

Many of you who read **games™** regularly will know that we're quite keen on our games sounding as good as they look, and for that you need a top set of speakers. Not surprisingly, it's thanks to Creative that we've found a highly affordable yet incredibly high-quality package for gamers to enjoy. However, whereas the T7700 (reviewed in issue 23) was a set of PC-specific speakers, Creative has gone one better with the S750 and put together a 7.1 speaker system that works for just about everything from consoles and DVD players to MP3 and digital satellite boxes. Coming complete with titanium super tweeters for each of the six satellite units, full THX certification, a 210 watt subwoofer and even the ability to mix regular 5.1 and 6.1 channels sound up to a 7.1 level, the S750 becomes the new standard for reasonably priced speaker systems.

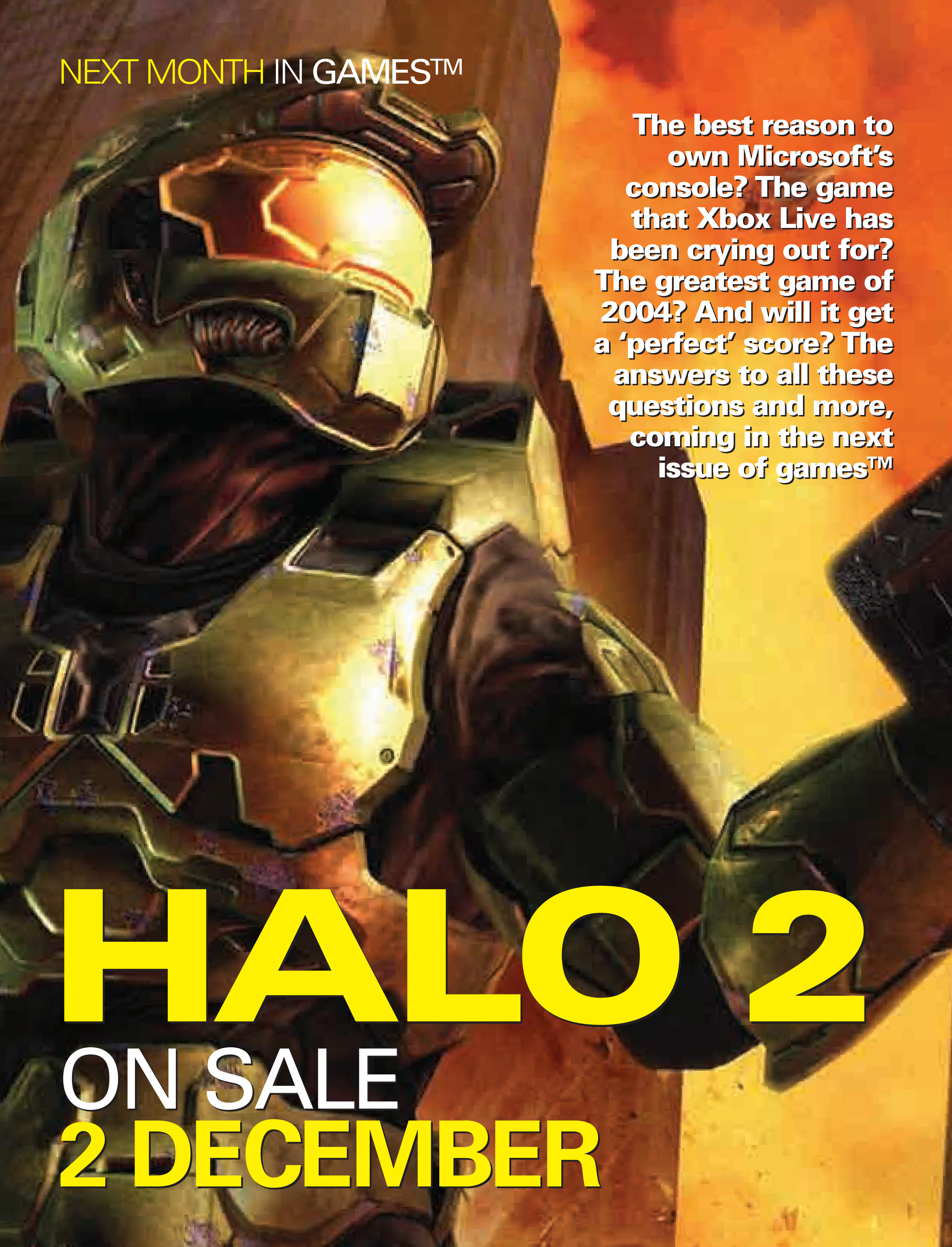
STREET FIGHTER II JOYPADS

Console: PlayStation2
From: Nuby Tech
Price: Approx £15
Available: Now (Import)



And so the argument rages on – exactly which style of joypad is best for playing beat-'em-ups like *Street Fighter II*? While purists among you might say that only an authentic joystick will do (you'll be wanting one of those Hori sticks, then), those of you who've only been able to experience console fighting will no doubt have your preferences too. However, it seems that for Capcom only the ergonomic style of the original Saturn pad will do and, as such, it has commissioned a range of celebratory limited edition pads to coincide with the fifteenth anniversary of the *Street Fighter II* series. Obviously, flashy looks are all very well but it's the build quality that counts and, thankfully, all four pads in the range are quite solid despite the low price. As with the Real Arcade Pro Stick, the pads are only available from Japan, so check your local import store or reliable websites such as www.jpngames.co.uk.


eMag


NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
The best reason to own Microsoft's console? The game that Xbox Live has been crying out for? The greatest game of 2004? And will it get a 'perfect' score? The answers to all these questions and more, coming in the next issue of games™
HALO 2
ON SALE
2 DECEMBER



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

Fancy knowing more about games like *The Matrix Online, Battlefield: Modern Combat, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, Resident Evil 4, Guild Wars*, the entire DS launch line-up and more besides? Then what we've got next issue should be right up your alley.

MORE… REVIEWS

Review code often arrives late – we accept that. Sometimes, though, it doesn't show up at all. And that's why great reviews such as *GTA: San Andreas, Killzone, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* and several other delights will be found in the next issue of **games**™, rather than the one you're holding. Dammit.

MORE… FEATURES

Global jetsetters, stand aside – **games**™ is on the move. We head to Barcelona to talk *Unreal Championship 2* with Epic Games, journey to Paris to see Digital Extremes' *Pariah*, and trek all the way to Canada to meet Retro Studios and discuss the ins and outs of working with one of the biggest Japanese publishers in the world. Plus, we throw a party to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the console that helped put the games industry where it is today – the PlayStation. Party hats and streamers at the ready…

Please note: Due to circumstances beyond even our control, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it. Probably words. And some pictures.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – this is where you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondent and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

I KNOW YOU'LL have received countless letters on this subject already, so I'll steer clear of the recent *Manhunt* furore. However, I feel a closer look at the way the mainstream media covers games, and the implications of that is in order.

When games hit the front pages it's never for a good reason, that much we know. But have you ever tried reading a newspaper's regular games coverage? With the possible exception of *The Guardian*, every single major national newspaper seems to have games 'reviews' written by people who clearly know nothing about the medium; some resort to using the children of the paper's other writers, while others just draft in writers from other parts of the paper. Remember the review of GBA *A Link To The Past* in the *Standard*, which slated it for being boring and wordy? That's far from an isolated example, and shows how little research these people do.

So why, I wonder, when the papers so clearly get it wrong every time about games, do people take them at their word when they rant about another subject (asylum seekers, football, crime, whatever)? The fact is that the British news media is a national disgrace. Go to a paper's website and look up articles about whatever subject you know most about: in no time you'll be staggered by the number of basic errors. You really can't believe a word you read in the papers. They work on the assumption that the majority of the readers will have scant knowledge on any given subject, and cut corners accordingly.

The answer's simple: stop buying newspapers. You can find out about any story that interests you on the internet and, by comparing what different sources are saying, build up a far more comprehensive understanding of it. So my call to fellow gamers is to not give money to these clueless, over-privileged human moral vacuums that populate the ranks of newspaper journalists, as they're determined to portray us as either overgrown children or slavering murderers (or both) because of our choice of hobby.

There's a reason why a specialist press sector exists for almost anything you can think of, and it's because the mainstream can't be trusted. If you must buy a paper though, don't believe a word: the writer probably knows less than you do.

Jim Caris

games™: Not backwards in coming forwards, are you? We love the bit about 'human moral vacuums'… Thing is, you have to remember that newspapers (as with almost anything you can buy) are there because someone can make money selling them, and not, in most cases, to serve some higher purpose like, say, educating the masses. As such, certain papers enjoy misrepresenting whatever they choose in order to sell more copies, which in turn means that sensationalism is often preferred to more level-headed reporting. The recent *Manhunt* debacle highlighted this when many papers jumped on the 'videogames are sick' bandwagon to broaden the angle on what was an isolated, yet undeniably tragic, murder of a young man. The fact remains that papers generally cater for a very different market to that which enjoys videogames, and as long as gaming is still seen as a marginal hobby (compared to music or films) it will be a handy scapegoat.

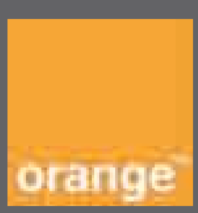
"THERE'S **A REASON WHY** A SPECIALIST PRESS SECTOR EXISTS FOR ALMOST ANYTHING YOU CAN THINK OF, AND IT'S **BECAUSE THE MAINSTREAM CAN'T BE TRUSTED**"



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LETTER OF THE MONTH

THESE DAYS, MUCH is made of the detrimental effects of gaming on the younger generation. As the mother of two teenage boys, it would be easy to take this route towards family strife. Well, I won't. The truth is, if I'd had access to the delights on offer at their age I'd have been right in there pressing those buttons with them.

Being forty-something places my early pub-visiting days as a heady mix of Woodpecker cider, *Asteroids* and *Defender* – a fiver blown on *Donkey Kong* before you could shout 'game over'. My first computer, a ZX Spectrum, gained me entry into the twilight world of the text adventure.

When mere words, flickering dimly on the screen of your brother's portable black and white telly, could arouse such excitement do you really think I'd have done my homework if a fully interactive game with 3D colour graphics and sound had been on offer?

So excuse me while I let my kids get on with it – they seem okay to me. The very advances that so worry the experts have equipped them with valuable life skills, way beyond those of this Seventies teenager. Technologically literate, politically astute, consumer savvy and in possession of a sophisticated sense of humour – never mind the PS2, it's the girlfriends I'm worried about…

Louise Dop

games™: We like you, and we wish you were our mum. Therefore, we'd like to send you the vouchers so that you can buy *Midway's Arcade Treasures* and reminisce about those carefree days down the boozer. Mmm, Woodpecker…



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting. Marks will be deducted for moaning about Nintendo.

EVER SINCE THE release of the PlayStation, 2D games have taken a back seat to 3D, but I was very disappointed at how easily many of the major developers gave up on 2D when there was still a lot more that sprites had to offer. It's very sad when you think with all that history behind it, 2D was so close to reaching its prime whereas 3D was just starting out. Yet even with developers more inclined to make three-dimensional games on the home consoles, 2D still reigns as king in the handheld arena, but for how much longer?

The Game Boy allowed developers to continue using sprites and bringing 2D to the masses, but it seems to me that the disregard of two-dimensional games on the consoles has had an effect on the handheld market too. Many developers seem less keen to take risks and you only have to look at the GBA to see updated Nintendo games from its back catalogue outnumbering most original titles. Two-dimensional games have not been allowed to evolve in the way that they should and, as such, have been cut short in their prime.

With the forthcoming release of the next generation of handhelds, is this the beginning of the end for 2D games? I hope not, but with nowhere else for 2D to take refuge it doesn't look like it has a bright future. Take a look at the upcoming DS games and you see an all too familiar scene of sequels, updates and the usual uninspired 3D titles. I believe that 2D has a well-deserved place alongside today's polygon-infected games. If developers take this opportunity to keep 2D games going then maybe people

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Text Life

Which is better on PS2, Star Trek: SU or BattleStar Galactica?
gamesTM: That's like asking whether death by electrocution is better than drowning.

my boyfriend sent me out for groceries & I came back with a GBA. what should my excuse be?
gamesTM: Why would you need an excuse?

Saw The Punisher movie 2nite.I liked the flash of full spectrum warrior.Didnt like that they had the oddball playing it.Anyway,hope the games not disappointing!
gamesTM: To be fair, we can't imagine The Punisher taking time out of his one-man war on crime to play a videogame, can you?

I have all 24 issues of GamesTM. One day I'll sell them on eBay and retire.
gamesTM: Though we tend to agree that gamesTM is priceless, we don't think that view is shared by those lovely eBayers.

The Retro section rocks, but more Rom Service please.
gamesTM: Rom Service will return…

Has anyone noticed that the life-stealing Disgaea is actually on CD, not DVD? How the hell…?!
gamesTM: Erm, we'll get back to you.

With Viewtiful Joe making his viewtiful way 2 PS2,is he likely 2 make an even more viewtiful appearance on the viewtiful XBOX? I do hope so.
gamesTM: **Pfft, we're more interested in the fact you clearly spend all your time writing letters to newspapers. Check that prose style, bad boy.**

I have yet to see a fully working 16-bit emulator on the GP32 and the choice to have it utilize SmartMedia makes it useless as an MP3/video player. Over-rated!
gamesTM: **There are plenty of other handheld options if the GP32 doesn't do it for you.**

will realise that they are just as much fun as any other 3D game.

One of the problems with 2D is that it cannot replicate many elements that 3D can do so well – for example, atmosphere, cinematic cut-scenes and realistic graphics. The only thing 2D games rely upon is gameplay in its purest form, but the casual gamer wants more for their 40 pounds nowadays and they don't seem to think that gameplay alone is worth that much. Developers are not doing enough to change this attitude towards games and are still releasing 3D games that have everything except gameplay.

This is their last chance to do something if they don't want 2D games to slip into obscurity, but if developers snub 2D again, the gaming industry is going to become a much duller place. When 3D reaches its peak and is devoured by generic sequels 2D will be the only way forward, but until then the games industry is going to be left with an empty space that no 3D game will ever be able to fill.
Paul Kavanagh

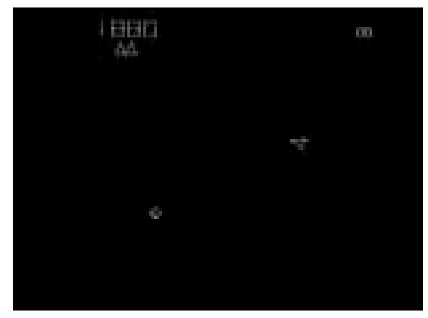
gamesTM: Arguably, developers have put their efforts into creating 3D games rather than 2D games, but who can blame them? Three-dimensional games are more popular and therefore more likely to sell. It's a bit like the difference between colour and black and white movies. Though black and white movies have their place and impact, mainstream audiences expect films to be in colour because that's the technological standard. Likewise, gamers tend to expect games to take advantage of the third dimension. Of course, there are always notable exceptions (*Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*, *Metal Slug 3* and *Ikaruga*, to name but a few) and there will even be mainstream hits like *Paper Mario 2* that ignite the imagination. It might not be as popular as it once was, but 2D will never die simply because there are some things you just can't do in 3D.

OUTRAGED IS A word I rarely use, but outraged I was when I read a 'review' of *Burnout 3* in *The Sun*. Fair enough it said the game was an enjoyable experience, but the running theme of the review was that it is simply a warm up for the impending *Need For Speed* game. 'A mildly diverting few hours' it claimed. Now call me cynical but I have a good suspicion that *Burnout 3* will be housed in my Xbox tray for considerably longer than *Need For Speed*.

Burnout 3 shows how a good game can be waxed and polished so much that it can prove to be a genre-defining game – something that is all too rare in these days of movie tie-ins and copycat platformers. How the reviewer could give the game an 83 per cent score is beyond me. I have nothing against *Need For Speed*, but what can the new instalment offer

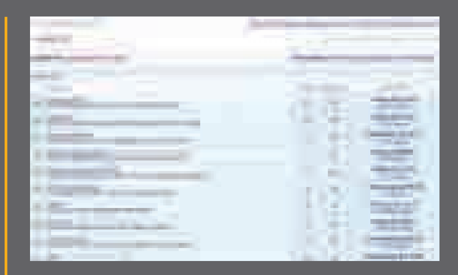


As long as quality games like *Ikaruga* continue to be released 2D gaming will never die.



Asteroids – best played under the influence of Woodpecker Cider, or so we're told.





FROM THE FORUM

SO, DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME?

dangerboyjim
Let's all take a moment to go all gooey and sentimental – what game took your gaming virginity? I think mine was *Mario's Cement Factory*. I think that it was released earlier as a small LCD unit, but my cousin had this sort of mini cabinet thing, and for the colour LCD to work you needed direct sunlight on the top of it. It was either that or *Granny's Garden* on the Vic 20.

CBx4
Hmm, not 100 per cent sure. Could very well be *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O' Fun* on the C64.

Adam_G
If I remember correctly, it was *Xenophobe* on the Spectrum. I loved that game.

Hong Kong Phooey
That would have to have been the Merlin handheld in 1978. It was an electronic game made by Parker Brothers. It had six types of memory training games, including noughts and crosses plus similar re-makes of well-known games. It was red in colour and the size of a small house brick!

Folkestonia
Jet Set Willy on the ZX Spectrum really broke me in gently, as did *SpyHunter*. But it wasn't until I got my NES and Amiga that games-playing became less of a hobby and more of a religion. Those days of Duck Hunting, Lemming killing and excessive Magic Mushroom eating turned me into the well-adjusted citizen that I am today.

Brian Bloodaxe
Did the Merlin have a keypad and a three-by-three panel of red lights? If so, I had one too! Just the other day I was wondering what the hell it could have been. The puzzle where you had to light up all nine lights was in *Resident Evil* as a door lock. The first computer game I played would have been on the Atari 2600. Probably *Tanks* or *Pac-Man*.

deviantyouth
Remember it clearly. *Fantastic World Dizzy* – a gem of a game to start on.

clockwork_satan
It was probably either *Fire Ant* or *Treasure Island* on the Commodore +4. Not counting those LCD games such as Scramble and things, of course…

Rick Hard
I guess I'll have to get out the ole C64. I think it was *Rambo*, because it was action-packed and all I wanted was action. It was a scrolling shooter, but you could go left and right to find an enemy camp in which there were hostages to rescue and other such shenanigans. But at the same time I was also playing *Miami Vice* and *Platoon* – both were excellent although extremely hard. The tunnel level in *Platoon* always got me. Blast!

"ALL GAMES ELICIT A RESPONSE. SADLY, FOR A VERY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE THAT RESPONSE CAN BE VERY FAR-REACHING AND DAMAGING INDEED"

that will come anywhere near the thrills available on *Burnout 3*?

Obviously both games are very different in style, something *The Sun* failed to take into account. This simply reinforces the reality that, for the time being at least, gaming will not be taken serious by certain mainstream publications.
Michael Petch

games™: We'll refer you to our comments on the previous page about representations of gaming in the mainstream media, and will add that reviews in national newspapers – particularly those papers that like to bleat on about how games are evil – are often unlikely to have been written by dedicated gamers, but nor are they aimed at dedicated gamers. We'll say no more, but we're sure you catch our drift.

I WAS FASCINATED by the issues you raised in issue 23 concerning violent games and their media-influenced link to aberrant behaviour. Whilst I have every sympathy for those affected by this tragic loss of young life, I would have to say that I firmly believe that games are partially responsible for this young man's death.

I have always believed that the whole point of any media was to evoke an emotional response of some sort, if they didn't, why would you bother reading a book, watching a good film, or, for me, sitting down for a good gaming session? All these things can make you angry, sad or happy. In the case of Warren LeBlanc, a game triggered a delusional state that led him to, regretably, kill Stefan Pakeerah.

In this situation the results were tragic, but as with any human, the right (or wrong) kind of stimulus can trigger an emotional response. *Manhunt* wouldn't trigger an emotional response in most people, but who's to say that this young man could not have been equally affected by *EastEnders*, or *Playbus*? If it's in you, it's in you. Would the media have been so quick to blame *EastEnders*, though?

Perhaps rather than sensationally blaming the trigger, teachers and parents could be given better training to spot and support clearly troubled youngsters. Who knows, given the right kind of support early on in his young life, maybe Warren LeBlanc would have seen *Manhunt* as dull and boring like the rest of us.

All games elicit a response. Sadly, for a very small percentage of people, that response can be very far-reaching and damaging indeed.
Les Johnson

games™: Who can honestly say what the 'trigger' was that led Warren LeBlanc to murder Stefan Pakeerah? We'd guess that some form of media influence played a part, maybe even some form of predisposition, or perhaps it was even fear of what might happen to him if he couldn't pay his debts – we will never know for certain. As you rightly point out, games and other forms of media can be incredibly potent stimuli for certain individuals, but there is little possibility for second-guessing who might be more likely to act upon or be stimulated by media, which makes policing individuals not only difficult but also potentially discriminative. Therefore, we have to put faith in our censorship laws and our parenting skills – unless, of course, you wish to lose your right to live your life as you choose.

“When you are weary of battle,
please come back to visit me”



